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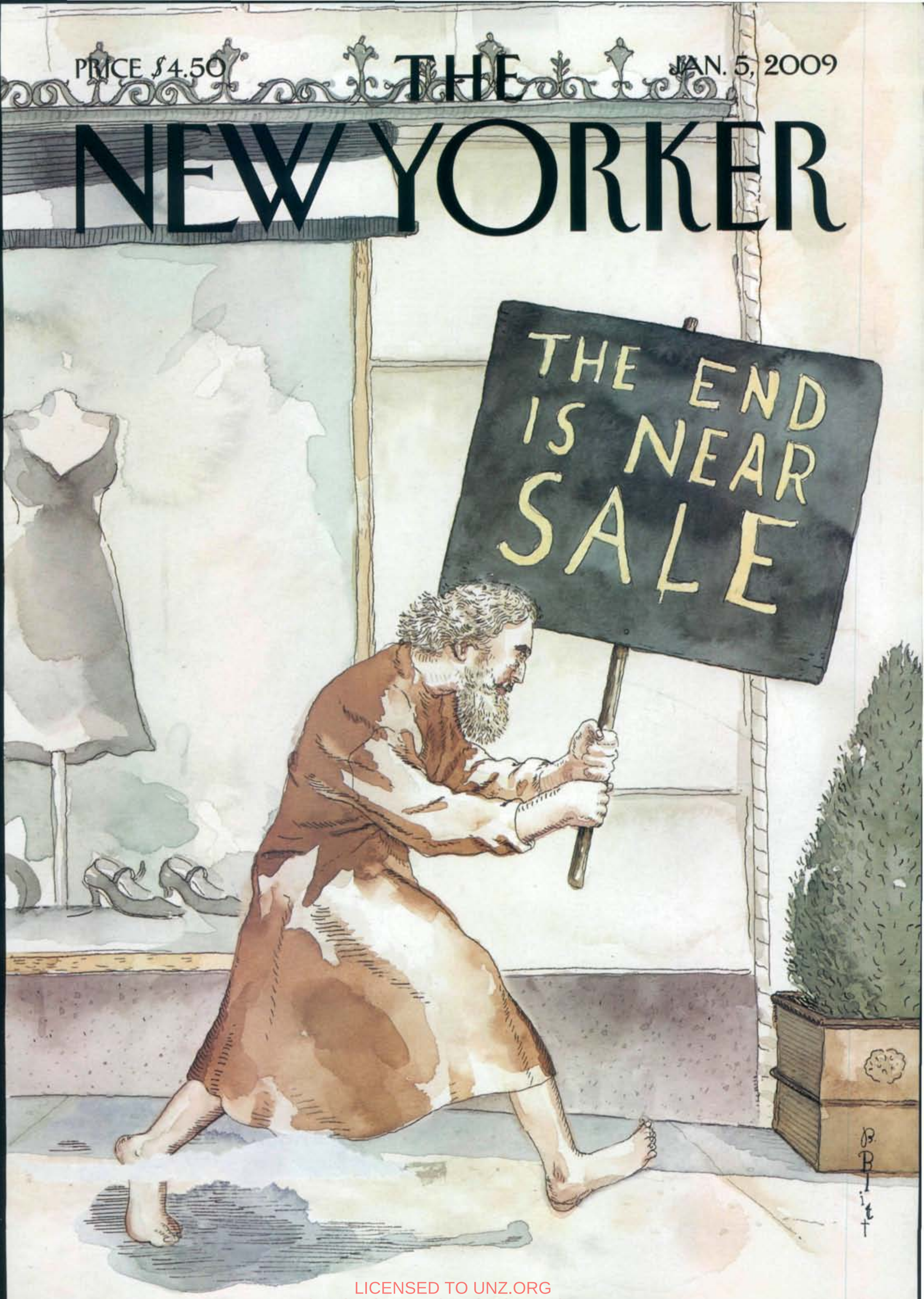
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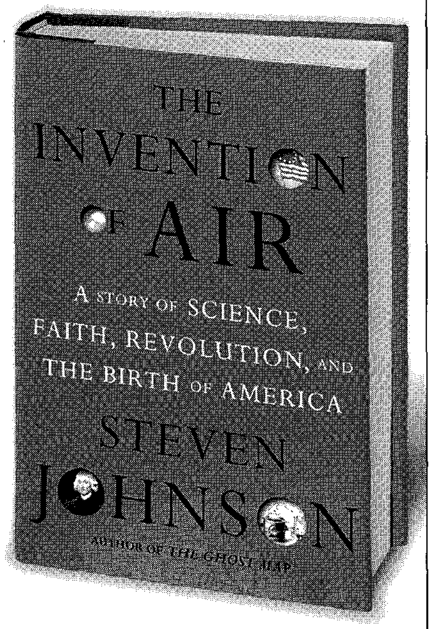
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THE NEW YORKER

JANUARY 5, 2009

6 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
19 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Adam Gopnik on a breathless moment; Illinois whistle-blower; Laura Bush's book.

Patricia Marx 24 LETTER FROM CHINA
Kosher Takeout
The inspection business booms.
Amy Ozols 29 SHOUTS & MURMURS
Looking Your Best
Kelefa Sanneh 30 ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS
The Pretender
Will Oldham and his music.
Louis Menand 36 A CRITIC AT LARGE
It Took a Village
What the Voice started.
Jonathan Harr 46 A REPORTER AT LARGE
Lives of the Saints
Doing relief work in dangerous places.
Julian Barnes 60 FICTION
"The Limner"

THE CRITICS
BOOKS
Ariel Levy 66 *"The Joy of Sex," updated.*
69 Briefly Noted
John Lahr 70 THE THEATRE
"Pal Joey."
Alex Ross 72 MUSICAL EVENTS
Elliott Carter, Olivier Messiaen.
Anthony Lane 74 THE CURRENT CINEMA
"Valkyrie," "Waltz with Bashir."

POEMS
Richard Wilbur 42 "Trismegistus"
Richard Wilbur 57 "Anterooms"
Liz Waldner 62 "A Sensible Life"

COVER *"Everything Must Go," by Barry Blitt* DRAWINGS *Barbara Smaller, Alex Gregory, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Gahan Wilson, Jack Ziegler, Drew Dernavich, Robert Leighton, Mick Stevens, Michael Maslin, Harry Bliss, Edward Frascino, Roz Chast* SPOTS *Philippe Petit-Roulet*

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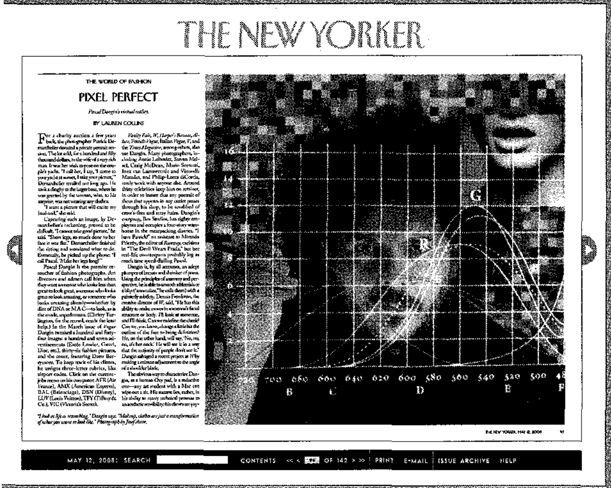

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BY LAUREN COLLINS

16
14
12
G
R
700 680 660 640 620 600 580 560 540 520 500
B C D E F
THE NEW YORKER, MAY 12, 2008
MAY 12, 2008: SEARCH
CONTENTS
<< <
OF 142 > >>
PRINT
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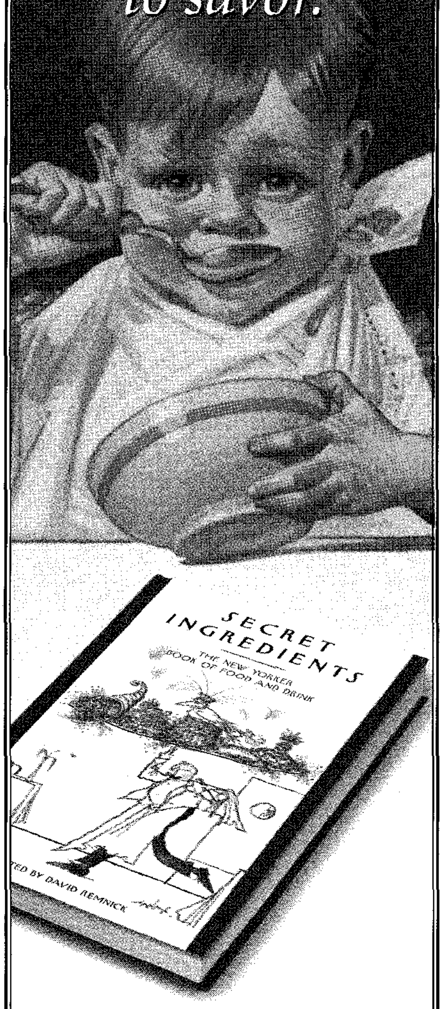

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jonathan Harr ("Lives of the Saints," p. 46) is the author of "A Civil Action" and "The Lost Painting."

Adam Gopnik (Comment, p. 19) has written several books, including "Through the Children's Gate: A Home in New York" and "Angels and Ages," which comes out next month.

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Liz Waldner (Poem, p. 62) will publish her seventh book of poetry, "Trust," in the spring.

Ariel Levy (Books, p. 66), a staff writer, is the author of "Female Chauvinist Pigs."

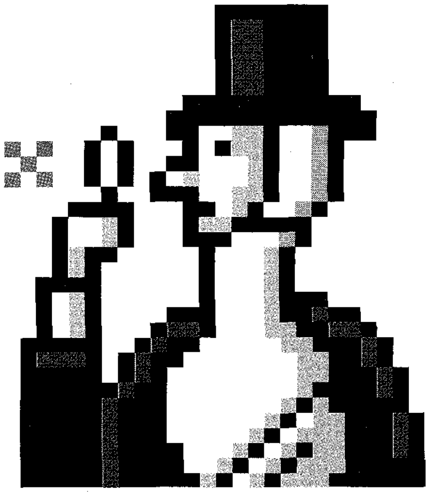
John Lahr (The Theatre, p. 70), the magazine's senior drama critic, is working on a biography of Tennessee Williams.

Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 72) is the author of "The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century," which won the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism.

Anthony Lane (The Current Cinema, p. 74) is a staff writer and a film critic for the magazine. "Nobody's Perfect" is a collection of his *New Yorker* reviews and profiles.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Ariel Levy talks about "The Joy of Sex," plus a slide show of illustrations from the old and new editions. / Photographs of refugee camps in Chad, by *Christoph Bangert*. / *Joan Acocella*, *Paul Goldberger*, *Anthony Lane*, *James Wood*, and the rest of the critics list their favorites of 2008. / The Cartoon Lounge rings in the New Year, the Book Bench resolves to tackle "2666," plus blog posts by *Roger Angell*, *Steve Coll*, *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *George Packer*, and others. / A complete archive of every issue, back to 1925, plus online access to the latest issue on Mondays, for subscribers. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.



THE MAIL

IN A NAME

George Packer's analysis of the recent Mumbai terrorist attack identifies the need for a comprehensive regional diplomatic response, and points to the irony of the Bush Administration's offering advice on how others should respond, having so botched its own response to the attacks of September 11th (The Talk of the Town, December 15th). The complexity of dealing with the Mumbai attack requires at the very least a better understanding of the term Lashkar-e-Taiba, the name of the group held responsible for the attack, than is conveyed by Army of the Pure. More appropriate would be Militia of the Righteous. Understood as "righteous," Taiba identifies the militant intensity of fundamentalist Islamist jihadis. The idea of "pure," on the other hand, lies in the name Pakistan itself—Land of the Pure—which was used by the Muslim poet Muhammad Iqbal to identify a much more inclusive and representative image of Islam. The designation of Pakistan is itself elusive. What is Asif Ali Zardari the President of? A wise diplomat had characterized Pakistan as different from most countries, which, when they become independent, look for an army to protect them; Pakistan is an army looking for a country to defend.

James H. K. Norton
Vineyard Haven, Mass.

BERNSTEIN AND RACE

I know Alex Ross to be a music critic so sublime that he should be spared from irksome toil. A random example: his sensitive reassessment of Leonard Bernstein's career says that the journalist Tom Wolfe attended the now legendary party for the Black Panthers in Bernstein's Park Avenue penthouse and wrote an article about it, "Radical Chic," for *New York* (A Critic at Large, December 15th). The toll the toil of digging for that fact took upon Ross became all too apparent in the four digs that followed. One: "Wolfe reduced Bernstein's passion for African-American music to a caricature of racial tourism." In fact, "Radical Chic" does not bring up that subject in any way whatsoever. Two: The article was "pushing the idea that [Bernstein] was obsessively fixated on the figure of a 'Negro by the piano' (perhaps a case of projection on the part of [Wolfe])." In fact, Bernstein projected that figure himself in an apparition *before* the party and described it—"Within the curve of the piano sits a well-dressed Negro"—in John Gruen's "The Private World of Leonard Bernstein." Three: "If, as William F. Buckley, Jr., said, Bernstein was parroting the lingo of fanatics, Wolfe was, in his own way, a mouthpiece, his fashionably tart prose advancing the new art of wedge-issue politics." Let us avert our eyes from the rhetorical wreck on the highway and merely point out that Wolfe has never been anybody's mouthpiece, and his interest in political journalism is nil. Four: "The entire episode reeks of hysteria." Wrong word. There is a difference between hysteria and hysterically funny. Music Critic Ross was two at the time.

Tom Wolfe
New York City

Alex Ross replies: "Before the party" is a deceptive phrase. Wolfe took a discarded prose sketch from 1966, which Gruen found in a sheaf of notes, and wove it into Bernstein's supposed interior monologues of 1970. "That damnable Negro by the piano," the Bernstein character seems to think at the end of Wolfe's piece. This conceit supplants Bernstein's entire engagement with black culture. A "sensitive reassessment" is needed not least because of the damage that "Radical Chic" did to Bernstein's image.

CORRECTION: The illustration on page 30 of the December 22nd & 29th issue was incorrectly credited; the artist was Victor Marchand Kerlow.

•

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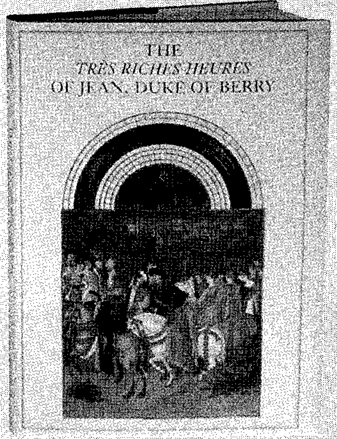

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
BUH-BYE

Just as "Boeing-Boeing" comes to a close (on Jan. 4), 3LD Art & Technology Center picks up the slack in flight-attendant-themed plays, with "Wickets." Directed by Clove Galilee and Jenny Rogers, the show is an adaptation of Maria Irene Fornes's 1977 play, "Fefu and Her Friends," about eight women who meet to organize a theatre project. "Wickets" sets the action on an airplane and reimagines the women as stewardesses. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
ETERNAL TEEN-AGER

The rock forefather Chuck Berry is portrayed by the rapper Mos Def in the new film "Cadillac Records," but the man himself is still alive and well and fully capable of reelin' and rockin', even at the age of eighty-two. Berry will play a pair of shows on New Year's Eve at the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill. (See page 9.)

DANCE
MEN IN TIGHTS

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, affectionately known as the Trocks, finish up their annual holiday run at the Joyce. The troupe, made up entirely of men who perform in drag, displays its admirable technical ballet chops with an abundance of cheeky swagger in such numbers as "Swan Lake Act II," "Majisimas," and "Go for Barocco." (See page 12.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
COUNTDOWN

Those who wish to grab one last bit of holiday cheer from the classical-music scene have several enticing concert choices as they bid farewell to 2008, including Susan Graham singing with the New York Philharmonic and the guitarist Eliot Fisk performing with the Ensō String Quartet at the 92nd Street Y. (See pages 12 and 13.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
FRESH AIR

End the year between boroughs: a walking tour of the Brooklyn Bridge, with a stop mid-span at midnight, presents an alternative to more typical New Year's Eve celebrations. (See page 16.)

The Polar Rink, at the American Museum of Natural History. Photograph by Gus Powell.

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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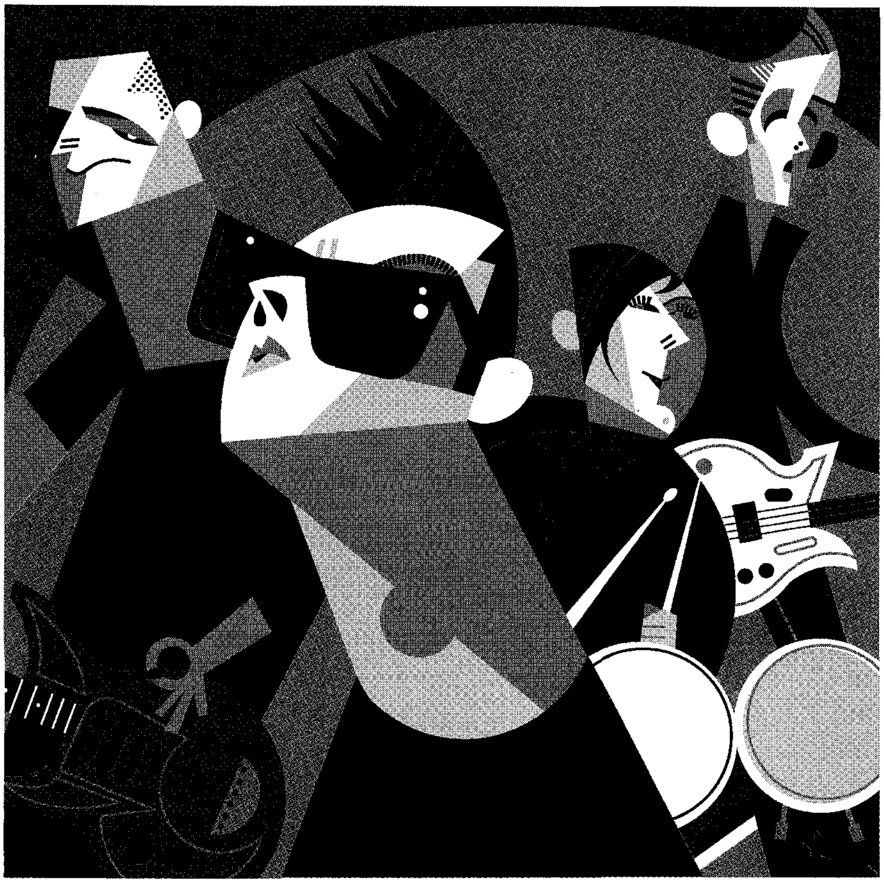
THE AMERICAN PLAN
Manhattan Theatre Club presents Richard Greenberg's play, set in the nineteen-sixties, about a young woman who lives across the lake from a Catskills resort and falls in love. Mercedes Ruehl and Lily Rabe star; David Grindley ("Journey's End") directs. Previews begin Jan. 2. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

BECKY SHAW
Peter DuBois directs Gina Gionfriddo's comedy, about a newlywed couple who fix up two friends. In previews. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

THE CONNECTION
Judith Malina directs Jack Gelber's play from 1959, in which junkies and jazz musicians are filmed as they wait to buy drugs. In previews. (Living Theatre, 19 Clinton St. 212-352-3101.)

HEDDA GABLER
Mary-Louise Parker, Michael Cerveris, Paul Sparks, Peter Stormare, Lois Markle, and Ana Reeder star in a new adaptation, by Christopher Shinn, of the Ibsen drama, about a woman trapped in an unhappy marriage. Ian Rickson directs the Roundabout Theatre Company production. Previews begin Jan. 6. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

WICKETS
Clove Galilee and Jenny Rogers direct this adaptation of Maria Irene Fornes's "Fefu and Her Friends," set on an airplane, about the inner lives of eight stewardesses. Previews begin Jan. 3. (3LD Art & Technology Center, 80 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101.)



The swaggering Scottish rockers of Glasvegas pay a visit to the Bowery Ballroom.

PABLO LOBATO

NOW PLAYING

BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL
Fans of Lee Hall and Stephen Daldry's 2000 movie, set in northern England in the mid-nineteen-eighties, about a boy who quits boxing to take up ballet, may notice that Daldry's musical adaptation, with songs by Elton John, lacks a few of the film's charms—nuanced characters, the memorable final scene, T. Rex. But it does have a satisfying combination of hardscrabble wit and populist brio that's especially exciting to see on Broadway. Three boys alternate in the title role; in a recent performance, Kiril Kulish danced thrillingly as Billy, and David Bologna was terrific as his cross-dressing friend, Michael. The show ably demonstrates dance's power to free the soul and inspire the crowd; in one of the best numbers, bobbies, striking miners, little girls in tutus, Billy, and his teacher dance together, belting out the words "solidarity forever." (Imperial, 240 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN
Garry Hynes directs Martin McDonagh's play, set in 1934, about an orphan in an Irish town who becomes enthralled with a film crew that arrives to make a movie. An Atlantic Theatre Company co-production with Galway's Druid Theatre. (336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

HOME
The Signature's season devoted to the Negro Ensemble Company continues with Samm-Art Williams's swift-footed tale of dreams deferred, which gave the troupe a hit when it played on Broadway, in 1980. Kevin T. Carroll plays Cephus Miles, who comes of age in the nineteen-fifties in the tobacco fields of North Carolina and prays to a God who he's convinced has fled to Miami. After Cephus lands in prison for dodging the draft, he moves to the disillusioning big city, until, finally, fate brings him back to the "soft beautiful black sod" of home. Two superb actresses (Tracey Bonner and January LaVoy) play a multitude of other characters, and Ron OJ Parson's production sails on the life-worn humor of Williams's script. (Signature Theatre Company, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

IMPROBABLE FREQUENCY
This Irish import is a quirky sci-fi spy thriller, set in neutral Dublin in 1941, spoken in heroic couplets, with twenty songs in the first act and fourteen in the second. But the charm of Irish wit and some nifty absurd plotting triumph over tedium. Arthur Riordan, who wrote the book and the lyrics, Bell Helicopter, who wrote the music, and Lynne Parker, who directs the folderol, don't just kiss the Blarney stone; they gobble it. Full of puns, word games, and elaborate rhymes, the show is more operetta than musical, somewhere between Gilbert and Sullivan and Noël Coward. Slick it ain't. Among the lively cast, Sarah-Jane Drummey and Peter Hanly are particularly droll. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Jan. 4.)

A LIGHT LUNCH
At the Flea, the world première of a play by A. R. Gurney, about the meeting of a Texas politician and a literary agent. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

LIZA'S AT THE PALACE
Liza Minnelli's new show, her second comeback, feels more like a rally than a recital. Instead of taking you on a journey with her renditions, she continually brings you back to her, to the legend of her collapse—the divorces, the drinking, the depressions—and to her theatrical pedigree, which includes her godparents, Ira Gershwin and Kay Thompson, who more or less take care of the second act. Under the cunning direction of Ron Lewis, and backed by a first-rate big band, Minnelli puts on a performance that is less about craft than about crowd control. Most star turns make a show of perfect poise; Minnelli puts on a show of perfect discombobulation: the spectacle of survival is the thrill. There is vitality but no joy, technique but no truth. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/22 & 29/08.) (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. Through Jan. 4.)

NATHAN THE WISE
Richard Sewell adapts the Gotthold Lessing dramatic poem, about a Jewish merchant in Muslim Jerusalem during the Christian Crusades. Melissa Maxwell directs. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. Through Jan. 4.)

PAL JOEY
At Studio 54, Roundabout Theatre Company presents the Rodgers and Hart musical from 1940. (Reviewed in this issue.) (254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

SHREK THE MUSICAL
At two and a half hours, this musical is thirty minutes and four songs too long. It's really a pantomime, a vulgar spectacle in which the makers—the director, Jason Moore; the designer, Tim Hatley; the composer, Jeanine Tesori; and the lyricist and book writer, David Lindsay-Abaire—have not risen to the challenge of fantasy, to make something genuinely imaginative, but have settled instead for the safely generic. Brian d'Arcy James, Sutton Foster, and Christopher Sieber give it their all, but mediocrity defeats even their charisma. Tap-dancing mice and an exploding bird are the high points of a listless evening. As the audience exits, "I'm a Believer," a Monkees song from the movie but not the show, blasts over the speakers, and this tells you how much faith the producers have in the Broadway score. If you like burping and farting onstage, this is your show; otherwise, get the DVD and suffer banality in the comfort of your own home. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

WOMEN BEWARE WOMEN
You need a good map to find your way around the complex relationships in Thomas Middleton's seventeenth-century drama, but this Red Bull Theatre production never makes the grid of myriad hookups quite clear enough to enjoy. But clarity isn't the priority here: as directed by Jesse Berger, the tragedy is now being played as a kind of gay burlesque, for laughs. The plot lends itself to mockery: Young Leantio brings his new wife, Bianca, home to Florence, where she is immediately swept away by the powerful Duke. In order to forget Bianca, Leantio starts

sleeping with Livia, a two-time widow, who seems attracted to her own brother, and he to her, though he's also in love with their niece, who's about to marry the town fool (he's rich). Unfortunately, in spite of the cast's efforts to play up the characters' campiness—in their beautiful costumes, on the two-story set—it's not all that funny. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-352-3101. Through Jan. 5.)

Also Playing

ALL MY SONS: Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **ARIAS WITH A TWIST:** HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101. Through Dec. 31. **THE ATHEIST:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-352-3101. Through Jan. 4. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE BLACK MONK:** Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Jan. 3. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 4. **DIVIDING THE ESTATE:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 4. **EQUUS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. Through Jan. 4. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **IRVING BERLIN'S WHITE CHRISTMAS:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. Through Jan. 4. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **THE LITTLE MERMAID:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **SATURN RETURNS:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 4. **SLAVA'S SNOWSHOW ON BROADWAY:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 4. **SLEEPWALK WITH ME:** Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPEED-THE-PLOW:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **STREAMERS:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **13:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 4. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Dec. 31: **Chuck Berry** rings in the New Year. Jan. 3: The **Mighty Sparrow.** Many musicians came out with songs in support of Barack Obama this fall, but few were more sunny than the legendary calypso singer's "Barack the Magnificent."

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (800-745-3000)—Dec. 31: While the **Damned** may have lacked the outrage of the Sex Pistols and the agitprop of the Clash, they were the first British punk band to issue a proper LP (the seismically influential "Damned Damned Damned," in 1977). The group played a surprisingly melodic and accessible brand of pop, albeit laced with high-voltage guitars and a gothic aesthetic. Though they're without their founder and powerhouse drummer Rat Scabies, the Damned are still going strong.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 29-31: The punk-rock poetess **Patti Smith** and her band perform their now customary New Year's shows. Jan. 6: The trick to understanding **Glasvegas,** from Scotland, is in the second half of the name. The youngsters from Glasgow play glitzy, retro-leaning rock that belies the grim nature of their home town.

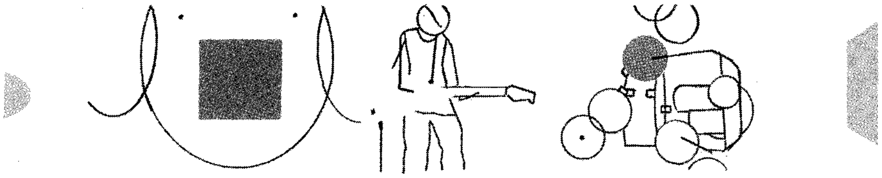
KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3132)—Dec. 31: The final show at this location (the club, which, believe it or not, has branches in Hollywood, Boise, and Spokane, is moving to Brooklyn) features the **Akron/Family,** an experimental rock band that draws inspiration from such psychedelic-folk acts as the Incredible String Band. And, like their late-sixties predecessors, they are versatile—capable of chaotic, acid-rock guitar solos, repetitive group singing, and soft, finger-picked acoustic laments. They'll be joined by the San Francisco quartet **Deerhoof**—who can slip from free jazz to rock with an easy theatricality—among many other acts.

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (800-745-3000)—Dec. 31: **My Morning Jacket,** an energetic and hirsute outfit from Louisville, Kentucky, fuses gritty Southern swagger and genre-straddling versatility. The group freaks out on its latest record, "Evil Urges," which embraces everything from arena-ready ballads to funky R. & B.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Dec. 31: The low-fi duo **Crystal Castles** brings a video-game sound to the dance floor.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Dec. 31: Want to hear some Cuban and Brazilian music but can't get to Havana or Rio de Janeiro? The vocalist **Xiomara Laugart,** who has performed the lead role in the Off Broadway play "Celia: The Life and Music of Celia Cruz," splits a bill with the **Bahian Allstars,** purveyors of samba, forró, and baile funk.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Jan. 2: The punk band the **Dickies** came out of San Fernando, California, in the late seventies, and became known for an absurdist wit, a penchant for hooks, and a front man, Leonard Phillips, with endearingly adenoidal vocals. Though they never achieved crossover success, they were influential (Green Day's Billy Joe Armstrong is a Phillips disciple), and they continue to attract an army of loyal fans.



POP NOTES
GOING SIX ROUNDS

Though it's hard to pick the best records of the year in today's highly ramified pop scene, it might be instructive to pit some of the year's top albums against one another. Some of these matches find wily veterans battling promising newcomers; others feature more unexpected pairings. Write us at goingsonblog@newyorker.com to vote on these head-to-head contests.

Ry Cooder vs. Steve Wynn: Cooder, one of the finest rock guitarists alive, has recently returned from Cuban music for a trilogy of albums about California. "I, Flathead," the last, is the most direct. Wynn, the former leader of the Dream Syndicate, has a long solo career filled with albums of powerfully amplified rock. "Crossing Dragon Bridge," partly inspired by a stay in Slovenia, is largely acoustic and completely successful.

Erykah Badu vs. Joan as Police Woman: Badu's "New Amerykah, Part One (World War Four)" is a landmark of complex, uncompromising soul music. Joan Wasser (a.k.a. Joan as Police Woman) stands at the other extreme of soul; her second album, "To Survive," is spare and stunning.

Los Campesinos vs. Think of One: The attention-deficit-disorderly Welsh pop band Los Campesinos released two records last year; its début, "Hold On Now, Youngster . . . ," was every kind of rush. Think of One, a long-standing Belgian ensemble, went to Morocco to make "Camping Shaabi," an unclassifiable, joyous dance-pop record.

Taylor Swift vs. Kathy Mattea: Swift is a sure thing, a beautiful and possessed young country-pop star who writes her own material and has followed her first album with an unjinxed sophomore release ("Fearless"). Mattea is a veteran who has achieved mainstream success while also working the folk and bluegrass margins of the genre. This year, as Swift was dominating the charts, Mattea put out "Coal," a surprisingly gripping concept album about, well, coal.

K'naan vs. Q-Tip: "The Dusty Foot Philosopher," the début by the Somalian-born, Toronto-based rapper K'naan, is a progressive but not preachy album that combines Eminem-style rhymes with a hard-won global consciousness. "The Renaissance," by the Tribe Called Quest veteran Q-Tip, further advances the convergence of neo-soul and adult hip-hop while exhibiting the rapper's fiercely humanistic intelligence.

Al Green vs. JJ Grey and Mofro: Green is the undisputed king of soul music, the only living legend in a sadly underpopulated genre, and this year he enlisted ?uestlove, Anthony Hamilton, and other neo-soul luminaries to record "Lay It Down," his most classicist album in years. Mofro, which hails from northern Florida, sometimes gets pegged as a jam band as a result of its relentless touring, but, on "Orange Blossoms," the lead vocalist, JJ Grey, demonstrates why he is one of the finest young soul singers around.

—Ben Greenman

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Dec. 31: **Blonde Redhead.** The local trio (the twin brothers Simone and Amedeo Pace, along with the vocalist Kazu Makino), which takes its name from a song by Arto Lindsay's seminal no-wave trio, DNA, has moved from inward-looking experimental rock in the vein of vintage Sonic Youth to more expansive dreamy pop.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Jan. 4: The effervescent pianist and singer **Daryl Sherman,** subbing for Barbara Carroll, brings in a trio for the weekly Sunday Jazz Brunch.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Dec. 31: The **Chico O'Farrill Jazz Orchestra,** led by the late arranger's son, the pianist **Arturo O'Farrill, Jr.,** will be joined

LAURENT CILLUFFO

by another Birdland regular, the singer **Hilary Kole,** to greet the New Year. O'Farrill's quintet fills out the remainder of the week, through Jan. 3.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through Jan. 4: The trumpeter **Chris Botti** is backed by a blue-chip band. Among the supporting musicians are the guitarist **Mark Whitfield,** the pianist **Billy Childs,** and the drummer **Billy Kilson.**

CAFÉ CARLYLE

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The bighearted, gruff-voiced entertainer **Steve Tyrell** has the stage through the end of the year.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Dec. 29-Jan. 4: The Cuban saxophonist **Paquito D'Rivera** is joined by a slew of younger players from his homeland.

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY

540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Dec. 31: The pianist and vocalist **Michael Feinstein** shares the New Year's spirit with the singer **Linda Eder.**

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Dec. 31-Jan. 4: The fusion-guitar hero **Mike Stern** welcomes the saxophonist **Kenny Garrett** (a fellow Miles Davis band alumnus) and the drummer **Dennis Chambers** to his group. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C."** Through March 15. ♦ **"The Philippe de Montebello Years: Curators Celebrate Three Decades of Acquisitions."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"Art and Love in Renaissance Italy."** Through Feb. 16. ♦ **"Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1717)."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Raqib Shaw."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Calder Jewelry."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Reality Check."** Through March 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave."** Through Feb. 16. ♦ **"Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927-1937."** Through Jan. 12. ♦ **"Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night."** Through Jan. 5. ♦ **"Pipilotti Rist: Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)."** Through Feb. 2. ♦ **"Vik Muniz: Rebus."** Through Feb. 23. ♦ **"Focus: Sol LeWitt."** Through June 29. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

TABLES FOR TWO
IRVING MILL

116 E. 16th St. (212-254-1600)—Lest anyone suppose Irving Mill to be named after some forgotten New York intellectual of the Alfred Kazin era, there is a huge millstone, converted into a table, near the front of the restaurant. Farther back, banquettes are printed with the signature of Washington Irving (who gave his name to Irving Place) and with scraps of text from his work. The effect, alas, looks tacky—more suburbs than Sleepy Hollow.

Irving Mill recently acquired a new chef—Ryan Skeen, an up-and-comer whose reputation rests on his apparent obsession with pork in its many forms, expressed in such dishes as pig's-ear salad and a thing called pork toast, mashed-up pork jowls breaded and deep-fried—a kind of croquette. The good news is that pork toast probably has fewer carbohydrates than regular toast, but, in every other conceivable way, it surely has a claim to being New York's most unhealthful dish. Pig's ear, meanwhile, sprinkled over radicchio and escarole, looks like pork rind but behaves differently in the mouth: instead of a crunch, it has a dry, almost ceramic crack. Ears are not the most flavorful part of a pig, and Skeen quietly gussies up the salad with a good deal of bacon. He seems less secure when he can't fall back on pork fat to tie a dish together. Appetizers of marinated raw fish (fluke or hamachi) lack distinctiveness; on a recent visit, a main course of sturgeon had nothing to say to the puréed beets that accompanied it. Still, Skeen achieves some lovely subtleties. The boudin blanc on the charcuterie platter has a tantalizing hint of citrus. Gnocchi with rock shrimp and Meyer lemon have a similarly acidic note, and are miraculously soft and light, while the shrimp, cooked not a second too long, retain a slight translucence and burst when you bite into them.

Generally, the restaurant seems unsure whether it's a lively after-work place (with a memorable burger enhanced with fatback and beef cheeks) or a more refined enclave where people might order fluke *crudo.* The space is cavernous, and the music in the bar is loud, but everything else is countrified in the manner of an overdone Hudson Valley bed-and-breakfast—pine sideboards, gourds, farming implements, landscape paintings, and photographs of stern-looking Victorians. Enormous wheel-shaped chandeliers hang from the rafters, bringing Errol Flynn irresistibly to mind. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for dinner and Sundays for brunch and dinner. Entrees $18-$28.)

—*Leo Carey*

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Dec. 31: New Year's Eve finds the **Mingus Big Band** fleshed out by such noted players as **Randy Brecker, Jeff (Tain) Watts,** and **David Kikoski.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Dec. 30-Jan. 4: The **Bad Plus** has been expanding its musical palette. The trio's latest album, "For All I Care," continues its M.O. of covering outré pop fare (Nirvana's "Lithium," the Bee Gees' "How Deep Is Your Love"), but it shakes things up by adding a singer, Wendy Lewis. (Lewis will not be joining the group during this engagement.) The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Theanyspacewhatever."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Catherine Opie: American Photographer."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"William Eggleston: Democratic Camera, Photographs and Video, 1961-2008."** Through Jan. 25. ♦ **"Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Corin Hewitt: Seed Stage."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Signs of the Times."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"The Black List Project: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and Elvis Mitchell."** Through March 29. ♦ **"Gilbert & George."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze."** Through Jan. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theatre, 1919-1949."** Through March 22. ♦ **"The Dead Sea Scrolls: Mysteries of the Ancient World."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Hanukkah Project: The Sound of Light by Julianne Swartz."** Through March 1. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Protecting the Word: Bookbindings of the Morgan."** Through March 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM

235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Mary Heilmann: To Be Someone."** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **"Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Museum as Hub: Six Degrees."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (212-869-8089)—**"Afghanistan, or The Perils of Freedom"** surveys photographs taken by Stephen Dupont between 1993 and 2008, a period of almost constant conflict as forces both inside and outside the Afghan republic fought for control. Though Dupont witnessed these power struggles up close, the most interesting images focus on the collateral damage to ordinary citizens. The best pictures here are twenty black-and-white Polaroid portraits of people posed before a portable cloth backdrop on the streets of Kabul on May 13, 2006. The tension between spontaneity and staging gives Dupont's subjects—a man with a fistful of cash, a girl with cartons of eggs, a B-boy wannabe in a bucket hat—a heightened presence. And the observers crowding around, peering into the camera, turn each photograph into an event. Through Jan. 25. (Open Mondays, 11 to 6, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30, Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 1 to 5.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith."** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **"Gino de Dominicis."** Through Feb. 9. ♦ **"Leandro Erlich: Swimming Pool."** Through April 13. ♦ **"Yael Bartana."** Through Jan. 19. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART

Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**"Reason's Clue."** With a title borrowed from Lao Tzu, the show features works by eight artists—among them Xu Bing, Michael Cherney, and Hong Hao—who mine the relationship between China and the West. Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Stephen Talasnik, Panorama: The Mapping of Prediction."** Through Jan. 25. ♦ **"Pedro Meyer: Heresies."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool."** Through March 15. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

JESSIE WENDER

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JOHN BALDESSARI
Baldessari has found a way to embrace the one thing that his generation of artists—in their early years, at least—set out to eradicate: expression. In his wall reliefs, collectively titled "Raised Eyebrows/Furrowed Foreheads," he extracts elements of facial expressions from anonymous photographs and enlarges them into quasi-abstract, nearly decorative motifs. Photography collapses into painting and conceptual cool gives a wry nod to Ab-Ex heat. Through Jan. 10. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

ALEXI WORTH
The pleasures and tensions of intimacy—between artists and viewers, painters and subjects, men and women—occupy Worth in his third show at the gallery, which plays a game of call-and-response with his last one. A fascination with obstructed views and the slippery nature of shadows (at once absence and form) recurs, as does a preoccupation with the interplay of art's favorite frenemies, photography and painting. Halved apples are among the allusion-packed motifs, signalling Magritte's trompe-l'oeil Surrealism, the biomorphic shapes of Myron Stout, the greenish hue of daguerreotypes, and the temptation of Eve. Worth embraces the conundrums of life after the Fall—including the camera's invasion of the canvas's Eden—and he renders them tenderly, epitomized by a loose swoop of white brushstrokes that delineate bedsheets. Through Jan. 3. (D. C. Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ANDREW GUENTHER
The artist devilishly flattens hierarchies of high and low, art and stuff, presenting his paintings and drawings alongside a miscellany of bric-a-brac on shelves—a cross between Carol Bove and Dave Miko. At times, the show feels breezy, as when a tattered pair of paint-splashed sandals dangles from a ledge near Guenther's stylized seascape of soaring gulls. Over all, though, a macabre mood prevails, like that of a vanitas still-life. A sign reading "Go to Hell" and a pair of blood-red Ray-Bans share space with a painting of the cigar-smoking ghost of Monet. Through Jan. 10. (Freight + Volume, 542 W. 24th St. 212-989-8700.)

DAVID HILLIARD
Nearly all of Hilliard's handsome color photographs are arranged as triptychs, with each image representing a slightly different viewpoint and moment in time. The narratives that these works suggest—most involving issues of masculinity and identity—are fragmentary and fraught. In one, the photographer and his father, with identical bluebird tattoos, stand chest-deep in a mountain lake, together yet separated by a panel of pure landscape. The boys and men in other pictures find themselves in various charged scenarios—some romantic, some erotic, all fully realized but appealingly open-ended. Through Jan. 31. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

PAUL P.
These watercolors, prints, pastels, and oils tend toward the dreamy, the impressionistic, and the homoerotic. The show's title, "Inclinations," derives from a 1916 novel by Ronald Firbank (cited in Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp"), and there's a nostalgic, literary air to P.'s figures, which conjure the dandies of Oscar Wilde and the Americans abroad of Henry James. Like the pages of a book, the diminutive works have a cumulative power, and the installation is best read as a single project rather than as a series of discrete pieces. P.'s fantasy is one of youth and androgynous beauty eternally preserved—like the picture of Dorian Gray. Through Jan. 10. (Reich, 537A W. 23rd St. 212-924-4949.)

KAY ROSEN
Rosen, who trained as a linguist, paints in the wisecracking vein of Ed Ruscha, with the political urgency of Barbara Kruger. At Gray, the multi-panel "No Noose Is Good Noose," from 1983, expands a game of hangman into a Reagan-era allegory of revolution. At Lambert, the text-based works are more colorful than the sombre grays of "No Noose." Puns, palindromes, and double entendres rule, as Rosen exploits the formal possibilities of typefaces. An oversized "V" protrudes like a fang in the white-on-red "Overbite." Often, the titles themselves offer clues. In the blue wall text "Removal from Office"—painted before Bush was a lame duck—an italicized "oval" leans to the far right within the word "removal." (Gray, 526 W. 26th St. 212-399-2636. Through Jan. 10; Lambert, 550 W. 21st St. 212-242-3611. Through Jan. 3.)

KARLHEINZ WEINBERGER
Weinberger (1921-2006), a Swiss factory worker, was also an obsessive photographer, with two prime subjects: naked, macho men and overdressed teenagers. Both groups—the rough trade and the rock-and-roll rebels—had their outlaw appeal, but it's the kids who really rewarded Weinberger's attention, and their portraits dominate this exhibition of rare vintage prints from the sixties. Working with Zurich teens who look like the cast of an American biker movie, the photographer zeroed in on bizarre stylistic elements that included medallions as big as hubcaps, belt buckles made from horseshoes or Elvis plaques, and thick industrial chains. It's counterculture fashion at its most insane and inspiring. Through Jan. 17. (Kustera, 520 W. 21st St. 212-989-0082.)

"SANDER'S CHILDREN"
It shouldn't surprise anyone that among the modern and contemporary photographers included here as followers in the tradition of August Sander are several fashion photographers. Sander's brand of engaged objectivity—five excellent examples of which open this savvy, provocative show—set the standard for the sort of straightforward, carefully observed portraiture at which fashion photographers often excel. Three of Irving Penn's marvellous "small trades" portraits almost steal the show, but they have serious competition from pictures by Seydou Keita, Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon, William Eggleston, and Lolo Veleko. Through Jan. 17. (Danziger, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-6778.)

Short List

NATHALIE DJURBERG: Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through Jan. 24. **ROBERT GOBER / FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. Through Jan. 31. **DANA HOEY:** Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Jan. 24. **FAIRFIELD PORTER / ANDREW FORGE:** Cuningham, 541 W. 25th St. 212-242-2772. Through Jan. 31. **ZOE STRAUSS:** Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930. Through Jan. 10. **"ORGANIC GEOMETRY":** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Jan. 10.

MUSEUMS—OUT OF TOWN

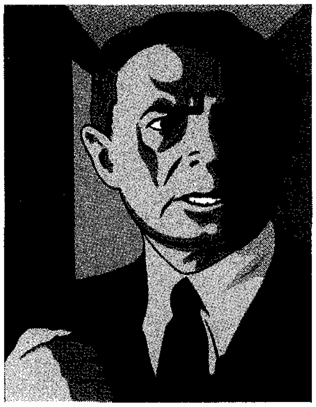
DIA: BEACON
3 Beekman St., Beacon, N.Y. (845-440-0100)—**"Zoe Leonard: You See I Am Here After All."** Some four thousand vintage postcards of Niagara Falls, bought in thrift shops and online, are arranged in grids on the wall. Initially, the memorabilia may seem at odds with Dia's ethos of Big Things and Big Ideas. But, in fact, the piece is in synch with the process-oriented, post-minimalist, conceptual bent of the museum's program—a found-object cousin of Smithson's non-sites, the American landscape transmogrified indoors. Also in evidence are a few of contemporary art's signature themes: repetition, replication, taxonomy, and time. The show even comes with its own guilty pleasure—the messages scrawled on the cards, which are sheer fun to read. Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Agnes Martin: Trajectories."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"Sol LeWitt: Drawing Series . . . ."** Through Sept. 7. For directions, go to www.diabeacon.org. (Open Fridays through Mondays, 11 to 4.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
On Jan. 6, the company introduces its eight-week winter season with an evening of Balanchine. First on the program is "Chaconne," the choreographer's

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FATHERS AND SONS

Whatever the director Nicholas Ray already knew about generational conflict was surely sharpened by his discovery, in 1951, of his then wife, the actress Gloria Grahame, in bed with his teen-age son from a previous marriage.



MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

Five years later, Ray made "Bigger Than Life"—screening at Film Forum Jan. 2-8, in a revelatory new CinemaScope color print—which features one of the most horrific scenes between father and son ever filmed. The story, based on a nonfiction article published in this magazine in 1955, concerns Ed Avery (James Mason), a schoolteacher and suburban family man who is stricken with a fatal arterial inflammation that a "miracle drug," cortisone, cures—at the price of drug-induced psychosis. Ray's depiction of Ed's murderous rage owes nothing to the factual account; the vengeful fury with which this formerly doting father, Bible and scissors in hand, threatens his own boy is an artistic explosion of the director's own. The sight of such deep-seated demons being liberated makes repression look downright appealing.

—*Richard Brody*

take on otherworldly love, based on Glück's "Orfeo ed Euridice," created in 1976 for his last great muse, Suzanne Farrell. Then comes the angular and thrilling leotard ballet "The Four Temperaments," followed by one of his most beloved works, the sumptuous "Vienna Waltzes." It's an auspicious beginning for a season that includes a revival of Balanchine's version of the nineteenth-century doll ballet "Coppélia" (from 1974), as well as new works by two young and relatively unknown choreographers (Douglas Lee, from the U.K., and the former New York City Ballet dancer Melissa Barak), Angelin Preljocaj's "La Stravaganza," Christopher Wheeldon's "Mercurial Manoeuvres" (2000), and Alexei Ratmansky's brilliant and sporty ballet from last season, "Concerto DSCH," an absolute must-see. ♦ Dec. 30 at 6 and Jan. 2-3 at 2 and 8: "The Nutcracker." ♦ Jan. 6 at 7:30: "Chaconne," "The Four Temperaments," and "Vienna Waltzes." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through March 1.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
The sumptuous fiftieth-anniversary season comes to a close. There are two more chances to catch Sweet Honey in the Rock harmonizing through the new piece "Go in Grace," two more to see Mauro Bigonzetti's new Handel piece, "Festa Barocca," and only three performances that don't include "Revelations." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 30-31 at 7, Jan. 1-2 at 8, Jan. 3 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 4 at 3 and 7:30.)

LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO
Much more than a bunch of guys in tutus and toe shoes, the all-male Trocks take their comedy, and their ballet, very seriously. In recent years, the technical level has risen high enough to give their parodies an edge so fine it almost disappears. That's particularly true of the new Spanish-themed "Majisimas," set to music from Massenet's "El Cid." Yet there's still plenty of blunter slapstick and hilarious tweaking of ballet mores in the old favorites, spread across two programs. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 30 at 7:30, Dec. 31 at 5, Jan. 2-3 at 8, and Jan. 4 at 3 and 7:30.)

NOCHE FLAMENCA
The no-frills flamenco troupe and its extraordinary star, Soledad Barrio, are best experienced in intimate settings. At Joe's Pub this year, the company's artistic director, Martín Santangelo, gets into the spirit of the season with a show titled "The Rhythms of Joy." (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Dec. 30 at 7:30 and Dec. 31 at 7.)

"ON TAP"
At the level of international fame, tap dancing is still a male-dominated form. Lower down, things tilt in the other direction. The women gathered here span multiple generations, from the pioneer Brenda Bufalino to the company of her greatest disciple, Barbara Duffy, to the young practitioners who take for granted what their tap mothers had to struggle for. Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, a lesser-known but no less extraordinary contemporary of Savion Glover, can do everything the men can do and look gorgeous at the same time. Her appearances are rarer than they should be. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Jan. 6 at 7.)

PARSONS DANCE COMPANY
If David Parsons and his dancers don't please you, if won't be for lack of trying. The first program mixes repertory pieces such as the signature strobe-light workout "Caught" with a teaser from the as yet untitled season première. Presented in full later in the week, the new piece features the East Village Opera Company, which plays and sings famous arias in pop-rock arrangements (think Queen), doing to the classical repertory something similar to what Parsons does to dance. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 6 at 7:30. Through Jan. 18.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Julie Taymor's rambunctious production of **"The Magic Flute"** (sung in English) has joined "Hansel and Gretel" as one of the Met's regular holiday treats. This year's cast features several young standouts, including the up-and-coming soprano Nicole Cabell, the baritone Rodion Pogossov (who stole the show at the production's 2004 première), and the soprano Cyndia Sieden and the bass Eric Owens, renowned for their exploits in the music of Adès and Adams, respectively. With Dimitri Pittas as Tamino; Asher Fisch conducts. (Dec. 31 at 1 and Jan. 1 at 7. These are the final performances.) ♦ When Puccini's "lyrical comedy," **"La Rondine"** (which, in its light touch, sometimes approaches the world of operetta), was given its U.S. première at the Met, in 1928, the cast was headed by the incomparable Lucrezia Bori and Beniamino Gigli. Reviving it in the composer's hundred-and-fiftieth-anniversary year, the company turns to two contemporary stars, Angela Gheorghiu and Roberto Alagna, who have made it a specialty; Marco Armiliato, a reliable hand in Italian repertory, conducts, leading the Met orchestra in the score's dance numbers (tango, foxtrot, Parisian waltz) and melodic flights. (Dec. 31 and Jan. 3 at 8.) ♦ Planned in an era of abundance, John Cox's new production of Massenet's **"Thaïs"** arrives in a time of scarcity, giving the Met stage all the grandeur of a nineteen-twenties movie palace. The sole opera in which the concertmaster gets an onstage bow, "Thaïs" is not only a delivery vehicle for the magical "Méditation" but also an efficiently structured study of sex and religion that exudes elegance from every pore. The newly slimmed-down Renée Fleming—dressed by Christian Lacroix—leaves her trademark vocal mannerisms behind, offering a performance of focussed sound and captivating character. Thomas Hampson provides sterling support as the doomed monk Athanaël, as does Michael Schade in the role of Nicias; Jesús López-Cobos conducts with passion and care. (Jan. 2 and Jan. 5 at 8.) ♦ Franco Zeffirelli's bustling and beloved production of **"La Bohème,"** one of the great holiday favorites, returns to the house, with a cast led by Maija Kovalevska, Susanna Phillips, Ramón Vargas, and Mariusz Kwiecien; Frédéric Chaslin. (Jan. 3 at 1.) ♦ With Massimo Giordano replacing Vargas. (Jan. 6 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK GILBERT & SULLIVAN PLAYERS
The joy and rapture of good G. and S. performances are more welcome than ever this New Year's. Albert Bergeret leads his renowned company (with orchestra) in a selection of merry scenes and songs, as well as audience requests; champagne provided. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 31 at 8.)

AMATO OPERA
Since Lehár's **"The Merry Widow"** is always diverting at holiday time, and the economic plight of the libretto's fictional Balkan kingdom (who will gain the widow's millions?) is scarcely less worrying than our own, it might be just the right time to take in a performance at Anthony Amato's tiny East Village theatre, which boasts a cast of robust professionals and amateurs. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Jan. 2-3 at 7:30 and Jan. 4 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Lorin Maazel and his orchestra get a final burst of holiday spirit with a New Year's Eve gala concert. This year's guest artist is the beloved mezzo-soprano Susan Graham, who will offer arias from "Carmen," "La Clemenza di Tito," and "The Merry Widow" ("Vilja," of course); music by Rossini and Offenbach is also featured. (Dec. 31 at 7:30.) ♦ The flow of the season returns two days later with a fascinating Pan-European program. Emanuel Ax, always willing to conquer new territory for the piano, is the soloist in Strauss's "Burleske" (which he plays with command) and in Szymanowski's scintillating Symphony No. 4 for Piano and Orchestra, an unfairly neglected post-impressionist piece. A fine

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

TUNE IN, TURN ON

The Swiss video whizbang Pipilotti Rist's latest be-in, "Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)," is the best thing to happen so far in the Museum of Modern Art's space-splurging, pompous atrium. Go. Lounge on the huge circular pouf. Let the surrounding, wall-filling video imagery—streaming in supersaturated color—and the droning electronic music wash over you. What with evocations of touch, taste, and smell in the bucolic pans and zooms of sunstruck flowers, fruits, animals, and adorably naked bodies, a perfect synesthesia takes hold. As always, Rist advertises an extreme hedonism that smacks of hippie psychedelia, but with a serene, strange, and moving gravity—a whiff of tragedy, even. It's as if one thinks, I have never been so happy, and then, with a chill, I will never be this happy again. The bird's-eye views from the museum's upper floors form a poignant, slightly scary memory: an intermittently twitching wreath of supine human beings. The work is art and, also, in its sumptuously and modestly passing way, something other and better than art.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

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group of Philharmonic soloists (including the violinist Sheryl Staples and the flutist Robert Langevin) begin the concerts with Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 2; Maazel will close them by conducting Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" (which, in Ravel's orchestration, has a decidedly French sound). (Jan. 2-3 at 8 and Jan. 6 at 7:30.) ♦ In a Saturday-matinée concert, the Mussorgsky is preceded by a chamber performance of Mozart's String Quintet in G Minor, K. 516. (Jan. 3 at 2.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

AMOR ARTIS CHORUS
The respected veteran Johannes Somary leads his chorus (and Baroque orchestra) in an all-Bach program on New Year's Eve that features such favorites as the Brandenburg Concerto No. 3, the Fourth Orchestral Suite, and the Magnificat in D Major. (St. Jean Baptiste Church, Lexington Ave. at 76th St. 212-874-4513. Dec. 31 at 8.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC
Dec. 31 at 7:30: The lineup for the barge's New Year's Eve gala—a Bach-fest that features the Brandenburg Concertos Nos. 2-6—speaks volumes about the current healthy state of the floating chamber-music series: a vital assemblage of young new-music mavens (including the violinist Tom Chiu and the cellist Eric Jacobsen) and vaunted veterans (such as the violinist Mark Peskanov). Cookies and champagne are on the house. ♦ Jan. 3 at 8 and Jan. 4 at 3: Peskanov joins the cellist Raman Ramakrishnan and the pianist Steven Beck in piano trios by Haydn, Mozart (in G Major, K. 496), and Brahms (No. 2 in C Major). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

ELIOT FISK
A toast of prosecco might be more appropriate for the matchless guitarist's New Year's Eve concert (of works by Vivaldi, Paganini, and Boccherini, along with a transcription of Bach's Suite No. 6 for Solo Cello), but champagne, offered at intermission, will surely be welcome. Fisk's companions include the guitarist Zaira Meneses and the superb Ensō String Quartet. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 31 at 8.)

YEFIM BRONFMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The roster says it all: an evening of reliable excellence in which the pianist teams up with such players as the clarinettist Stanley Drucker and the violist Cynthia Phelps to perform Schumann's Piano Quintet in E-Flat Major and the "Fantasiestücke" for Clarinet and Piano; Dohnányi's Serenade for String Trio rounds out the program. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Jan. 4 at 8.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS
Russian, Italian, and American voices—all irrepressibly Romantic—weave through the Players' latest concert, a program featuring Puccini's Minuet No. 1 for String Quartet, Glinka's Divertimento Brillante on Themes from "La Sonnambula," Nino Rota's Nonetto, and Vittorio Giannini's Piano Quintet; the pianist Adam Neiman and the violinist Rachel Barton Pine are special guests. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 212-799-1259. Jan. 5 at 2 and 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

CARGO 200
Aleksei Balabanov directed this drama, set in the Soviet Union in the nineteen-eighties, about two young people who encounter a serial killer. In Russian. Opening Jan. 2. (Cinema Village.)

DEFIANCE
Edward Zwick directed this historical drama, about a group of Jewish partisans in the Second World War who protect other Jews from deportation to concentration camps. Starring Daniel Craig and Liev Schreiber. Opening Dec. 31. (In limited release.)

GOOD
A historical drama, directed by Vicente Amorim, about a family man's moral conflicts under the Third Reich. Starring Viggo Mortensen. Opening Dec. 31. (Village East Cinemas.)

NOW PLAYING

AUSTRALIA
Preposterous epic kitsch from Baz Luhrmann. Nicole Kidman is Sarah Ashley, a rich, highborn English lady with clipped diction and a jacket that fits as tightly as a toreador's. She arrives in Darwin in 1939 to retrieve her husband, who has been dallying with Aboriginal women on the family-owned cattle station. The brawny Hugh Jackman is a roughneck known as Drover, who drives her to the interior. Of course, he will liberate the passionate sexual woman beneath the starch, and she will tame the nihilistic free spirit into a caring and responsible man. Luhrmann, lost in the desert, rushes the camera frantically along the ground, or sends it aloft in meaningless ascents. (Once he's up there, what can he do but cut to the ground again?) He wants to create huge, throbbing set pieces, but he never establishes a standard of normal reality from which those set pieces would be an exultant release. The movie is all bitter partings and joyous reunions and nasty Japanese dive-bombers who fly in and mess up everything. With Bryan Brown, David Wenham, Jack Thompson, and, as the Aboriginal shaman who arrives whenever the plot needs a touch of magic to push it along, David Gulpilil (who co-starred in the 1971 classic "Walkabout"). Written by Stuart Beattie, Ronald Harwood, and Richard Flanagan.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/8/08.) (In wide release.)

A CHRISTMAS TALE
The new film from Arnaud Desplechin, best known here for "Kings and Queen" (2004), weighs in at exactly two and a half hours, yet it barely finds time to peer beyond the battlefield of a single family. We are swiftly introduced to Abel (Jean-Paul Roussillon) and Junon (Catherine Deneuve), who live in Roubaix, France—the director's home town. Junon is suffering from cancer, and both of them suffer from their children: the endlessly grieving Elizabeth (Anne Consigny), the frankly irredeemable Henri (Mathieu Amalric), and Ivan (Melvil Poupaud), who is holding steady, despite the fact that his wife loves somebody else. In an often disorienting mixture of rages, flashbacks, speeches to the camera, and nods to other movies, the story rolls and stammers along, drawing the family into a Christmas get-together but denying them more than a glimpse of the harmony that we might, by tradition, expect. Desplechin's film is hard, funny, and upsetting, and even at the end we feel that we are only just getting to know these people, though it could be argued that they scarcely know themselves. With Emmanuelle Devos, who laughs at the whole pack of them, and Chiara Mastroianni (Deneuve's real-life daughter). In French.—*Anthony Lane* (11/24/08) (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE CLASS
Extraordinary. François Bégaudeau, a teacher in a Paris public school in the Twentieth Arrondissement, published a novel in 2006 chronicling a year in his classroom. Along with the director Laurent Cantet and the writer Robin Campillo, he then condensed and reshaped the material into a two-hour drama centering on the teacher (Bégaudeau, playing himself) and a small number of students (all played by actual students, though not the same ones he wrote about). Bégaudeau, who is in his thirties, is handsome, lean, and quick, with a strong voice; his slouching or rowdy fourteen-year-olds are mostly of African or Caribbean descent—still outsiders in France, and rightfully touchy about it. Some of them are resistant to education, which disrupts the pleasures of adolescence, and Bégaudeau aggressively comes after them, challenging, correcting, teasing, criticizing. The students are alive to him and come back hard, questioning French notions of discipline and manners. In all, "The Class" is a prime document of French post-colonial blues, though its relevance to American urban education could not be any greater if it had been shot in the Bronx or Trenton or South Los Angeles. In French.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/08) (In wide release.)

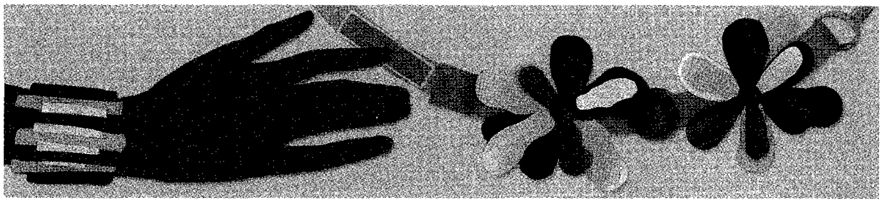
THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON
A child is born in New Orleans in 1918 with the features and internal organs of an old man; then, as time passes, his age declines until he goes through late middle age, middle age, youth, and so on, back toward infancy and death. This science-fiction reverse-aging conceit, from an early F. Scott Fitzgerald story, has been rendered by the writer Eric Roth and the director David Fincher with a fanatical literalness that occasionally touches the uncanny but often feels laborious and even pedantic. As Benjamin becomes younger, he turns into the handsome, fortyish Brad Pitt, and he has an affair with a vibrant, normally aging dancer (Cate Blanchett). They meet in the middle, so to speak, but the relationship is odd, since, instead of the fervent memories of youth, Benjamin has only the relief that he is no longer a crotchety old man. He's bland; he's Brad Pitt. There is much else, about New Orleans, the sea, and many other things, but the movie is an attenuated folly. With Tilda Swinton. The amber-hued cinematography is by Claudio Miranda.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

DOUBT
John Patrick Shanley adapts his own Broadway play for the screen, although moviegoers may feel that he hasn't adapted it enough. The year is 1964, the place is a Catholic school in the Bronx, and the problem is that Sister Aloysius (Meryl Streep), the resident dragon, is breathing fire. The particular target of her wrath is Father Flynn (Philip Seymour Hoffman), whom she suspects of having molested an altar boy. We are meant to see this as a solemn parable of belief—of its capacity both to grow without rational evidence and to fester without cause. Instead, we merely get to watch a pair of seasoned performers stage a demonstration match; this is won by Streep, of course, who comes across as a red-eyed compound of the Abbess from "The Sound of Music" and the Bride of Frankenstein. Stuck in between them, in the thankless role of umpire, is the kindly Sister James (Amy Adams), who doesn't stand a chance. The result is at once humorless and risible; one small nudge, and it could have toppled over into camp.—*A.L.* (12/15/08) (In wide release.)

FOUR CHRISTMASES
Talented actors left to run on autopilot can't enliven this schematic seasonal romantic comedy's predictable servings of high jinks and sentiment. Vince Vaughn and Reese Witherspoon star as Brad and Kate, a fun-loving bourgeois couple from San Francisco who are resistant to marriage and other obligations. When a cancelled flight thwarts their planned holiday escape to Fiji, they get stuck making the Christmas Day rounds of their divorced parents' quartet of homes, and the resulting chaos reveals unsuspected fault lines in their relationship. The tone fluctuates between forced uproar and soft soap, the stars have little chemistry, and the fine supporting cast (including Robert Duvall and Sissy Spacek, as Brad's parents, and Mary Steenburgen and Jon Voight, as Kate's) isn't given any solid footing. But one brief sequence of visual comedy, a pure, mechanistic slapstick number worthy of Mack Sennett, may have you laughing so hard you'll miss half of it, and Patrick Van Horn does a good turn as Brad's onetime best friend, who is now his mother's boyfriend. Directed by Seth Gordon.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

FROST/NIXON
In its transfer from stage to film, Peter Morgan's account of David Frost's lengthy set of interviews with Richard Nixon, in 1977, three years after he resigned the Presidency, has taken on an aura

of momentousness unwarranted by the event itself. Frank Langella's performance provides considerable insights into Nixon's intelligence, caginess, and fraudulent sentimentality, and Michael Sheen makes Frost into a toothy, bright, shallow but smart showman-journalist. The interviews themselves, always absorbing, build to Nixon's climactic admission that he let the country down during the Watergate crisis. The media whirl of negotiation, advisers, preparation, and so on is engaging enough, but the episode itself changed nothing. It was a journalistic coup, not a historical milestone, and the filmmakers don't seem to realize that. Directed by Ron Howard.—*D.D.* (12/8/08) (In wide release.)



SILJA GÖTZ

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE
MARNI

159-161 Mercer St. (212-343-3912)—This holiday season, I longed for world peace, universal health care, an end to poverty and disease, and, most of all, one of those chunky Marni necklaces made from colorful shapes of melted and stretched bovine horn. Oh, and could I also have that strand of fabric-covered beads anchoring a large plastron of midnight-blue resin? And the pendant that looks like a conference pass except that, instead of a name tag inside the clear plastic pouch, there's a grid of acrylic gems? These pieces ($400-$1,200), like most of the creations of the Swiss-born, Milan-based designer and founder of the label, Consuelo Castiglioni, look like futuristic takes on the groovy garb of the sixties. They can be found at the recently expanded Marni boutique in SoHo, where fuchsia-pink velvet capelets ($735), lizard-green silk tunics with ruffles ($1,150), and high-waisted skirts in prints inspired by stained-glass cathedral windows ($960-$1,150) hang from the ceiling and cling like ivy to the swooping stainless-steel clothes trellises that rise up from the white glass-tile floor. Against the wall, frivolities like truffle-gray Astrakhan mittens that go up to the elbow ($880) are displayed on backlit fibreglass boxes.

"You guys got bigger," a customer said to a saleswoman, surveying the elliptical-shaped space, whose mirrored ceiling and walls make it seem larger than its fourteen hundred square feet. "Yeah, we grew up," the saleswoman said. Let's not get carried away. Mature is not the first word that comes to mind when describing a place that has a teal-colored shaggy alpaca rug. Sorry to say, it's not for sale, but you can take home the pocketbook version—large furry bags with resin handles. They come in bluish, taupey gray, and citrus (lemon, not lime). How much do they cost? "Oh, gosh," a salesman named Jared said, as he looked at the price sticker on one. "This little guy is $1,290." As we went to press, Marni's fall-winter collection was fifty per cent off. Hmm. Maybe I'll have to postpone my plan to end poverty until next year.

—*Patricia Marx*

THE FURIES

The frontier comes off as positively Elizabethan in this roiling, hard-edged Western melodrama from 1950. Walter Huston, in his last screen role, stars as T. C. Jeffords, the swaggering self-made man who founded a great ranch through force of will but whose pride leads to financial imprudence. His tough, smart daughter, Vance (Barbara Stanwyck), is being groomed to take over for him, but the two men in her life get in the way. Juan Herrera (Gilbert Roland), a squatter on the land, is her devoted friend and wise counsellor, as well as an obstacle to the bank loan that T.C. needs; Rip Darrow (Wendell Corey) is the gambler she loves—and T.C.'s sworn enemy. Meanwhile, Flo Burnett (Judith Anderson), the new woman in the old man's life, also has designs on the ranch. The director, Anthony Mann, stages the action as a series of grand, clangorous confrontations; the jarring physical violence pales beside the titanic clashes of immense egos and desires—as well as those of new and mighty banking interests and age-old claims on the land. His stark images provide a fitting stage for the splendid actors' brazen rhetorical battles.—*R.B.* (Rubin Museum of Art; Jan. 2.)

GRAN TORINO

Clint Eastwood appears as, in effect, the last white man in America, guarding what might be called the last American car—a green 1972 Ford Gran Torino, lovingly preserved in his garage in run-down Highland Park, just outside Detroit. Eastwood, who also directed, stars as Walt Kowalski, a racist old man who lives next door to a family of Asian immigrants. At first, Walt (a vision of what Dirty Harry might have become) is their antagonist, but he then becomes their protector, as he helps them fight off the neighborhood gangs. The movie ends with a surprising act of renunciation. Although it's a minor work, the film is fascinating if you're interested in Eastwood's reflections on the characters he's played and his role in American iconography. With Bee Vang as the kid who becomes Walt's surrogate son. Written by Nick Schenk.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/08) (In wide release.)

MILK

Gus Van Sant's vibrantly entertaining bio-pic recreates, without starchiness, the San Francisco life of the gay activist and politician Harvey Milk (Sean Penn), who was assassinated in 1978, along with Mayor George Moscone, by a fellow-politician, the family-values conservative Dan White (Josh Brolin). The righteous march of events is warmed by the banter, the casual sex, and the candor of the gay milieu in the giddy seventies, the period just before AIDS, when life was free and easy. Much of the time, Penn keeps his voice down, but the fervor and humor are there in the most offhanded moments. Without ostentation, he creates a new body, a new temperament: he loosens his neck and shoulders and swivels his head; his smile is enormous and all-embracing; he holds an elbow out and pumps a forearm up and down like a semaphore as Harvey speaks in public. Brolin, a slab of hair lying low across his forehead, gives White a brick-headed, baffled manner, a tormented neediness. In the filmmakers' interpretation, there's a suggestion that White suffered from murderously repressed homosexuality. With James Franco, Emile Hirsch, Diego Luna, and Alison Pill.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In limited release.)

PLAYTIME

For this 1967 film, Jacques Tati—the unsurpassed satirist of technology's inhuman allure—built a grandiose, gleaming glass-and-steel skyscraper city on the outskirts of Paris and conceived his comic crises in the details of its disproportions. In the two zones of action (they hardly count as stories), Tati plays Monsieur Hulot, a tall, spring-jointed, aging Everyman who goes to see a bureaucrat about a document, while a busload of American tourists blithely disembark in a Paris of iconic landmarks that they see only fleetingly as distant reflections in glass doors. The spectacular settings give rise to romance and its frustration when, in the neon twilight, Hulot's weary glance through the windows of parallel buses meets that of Barbara (Barbara Dennek), a fresh-scrubbed young American. Emotions, identities, and even bodily functions are distorted by the mechanized uniformity, but Tati's despair is modulated by a sense of wonder. A grimly modern night spot is trashed by an American tycoon's anarchic revelry—an alternative International Style—and in the wreckage Hulot and Barbara finally meet. In French, English, and German. Screened in 70-mm.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade; Jan. 5.)

QUANTUM OF SOLACE

The twenty-second James Bond film is a strange affair. The hero is still hopping the globe in the quest to unravel a mysterious organization, as he used to do in the days of SMERSH. The difference, these days, is that none of it, not even the hopping, seems like fun. In the role of 007, Daniel Craig is brutish, joyless, and obsessive; you can't take your eyes off him, but you wonder if the punishment that he metes out is really directed at himself. He doesn't eat, he drinks to kill pain, and he manages to spend half the movie in the company of the ravishing Camille (Olga Kurylenko) without getting anywhere near a bed. His official mission is to pursue Dominic Greene (Mathieu Amalric), who is—wait for it—fast becoming a leading figure in South American water-storage circles. But the real mission, nurtured in Bond's wounded heart, is to avenge the death of Vesper Lynd, who won his love in "Casino Royale." The director, Marc Forster, whips us from one savage set piece to the next, regardless of logical connection, and the result can be read as the toughest and most expensive art-house film of the year. With Gemma Arterton, who lights up the action, all too briefly, as a fellow British spy.—*A.L.* (11/17/08) (In wide release.)

THE READER

The British director Stephen Daldry made a splash with "The Hours," and this new film is no less worthy, ambitious, and exasperating. The screenwriter, once again, is David Hare, who fillets the best-selling novel by Bernhard Schlink. For all Hare's expertise, however, we are stuck with the unsavory pretensions of the original tale. Kate Winslet plays Hanna, who, thirteen years after the Second World War, works on the trams in Neustadt, West Germany, and has occasional sex with a local teen-age boy named Michael (David Kross). Their first time, though lingeringly shot, has all the finesse of cheap porno; where else does a woman tell a lusty youth to shed his clothes and take a bath because he has dirt on his face? In the movie's second half, we see Hanna being tried and imprisoned for her wartime deeds; there is a shocking revelation, which comes as no surprise; and the middle-aged Michael (Ralph Fiennes) turns up to help his onetime love. Daldry takes things painfully slowly, not helped by a sappy score, and we are encouraged to muse upon the cultural shortcomings, or improvements, in the life of an aging member of the S.S. This is not an issue that most of us feel the need to worry about. With a strong performance, late in the day, from Lena Olin.—*A.L.* (12/15/08) (In wide release.)

REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

Commuters in identical gray suits and hats pour like lava through Grand Central Terminal and settle to work in vast open floors with shaded glass partitions. Cigarettes are lit and furiously smoked; Martinis, consumed by the bucketful, launch anxious bouts of adultery and heartrending quarrels. We're in the fifties, the alleged graveyard of American hope, and Frank (Leonardo DiCaprio) and April Wheeler (Kate Winslet) are a suburban couple who have the freedom to do nothing but tear each other apart. It turns out that there's a gap between the Wheelers' soaring spiritual ambitions and their actual talents and interests. Their dilemma is grounds for pathos, or possibly for satire, but is it grounds for tragedy? The story, sour and relentless, works toward a gruesomely unhappy ending. Winslet plays April as a will-driven hysteric; DiCaprio gets the externals right, but he's a little afraid of revealing the depths of Frank's shallowness. Watching the two go at each other may be cathartic for some, but it shouldn't be confused with movie art. Sam Mendes directed; Justin Haythe adapted Richard Yates's celebrated 1961 novel.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/08) (In wide release.)

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE
An eighteen-year-old Muslim tea-boy named Jamal (Dev Patel), born and raised in the poverty of Mumbai, teeters on the verge of fame and fortune. A nation awaits. Such is the old-fashioned, sentimental cliffhanger to which the screenwriter Simon Beaufoy and the director Danny Boyle have, with unembarrassed drive, committed themselves. Jamal is a contestant on the Indian edition of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?," and the suspicion of the police—who, in an ill-judged prelude to the story, hold and torture him—is that he must have cheated. His response is that experience alone, whether wretched or comic, has by chance furnished him with the correct answers, and the bulk of the film, constructed from flashbacks, proves his point. The style, seen previously in "City of God" and other movies, is what you might call urban-manic: heated performances, even hotter colors, and camerawork that vies with the editing for nerve and speed. The lad at the center of it all is actually on the dull side, but the energy around him—not least in the dance sequence over the final credits—is difficult to resist.—*A.L.* (11/24/08) (In wide release.)

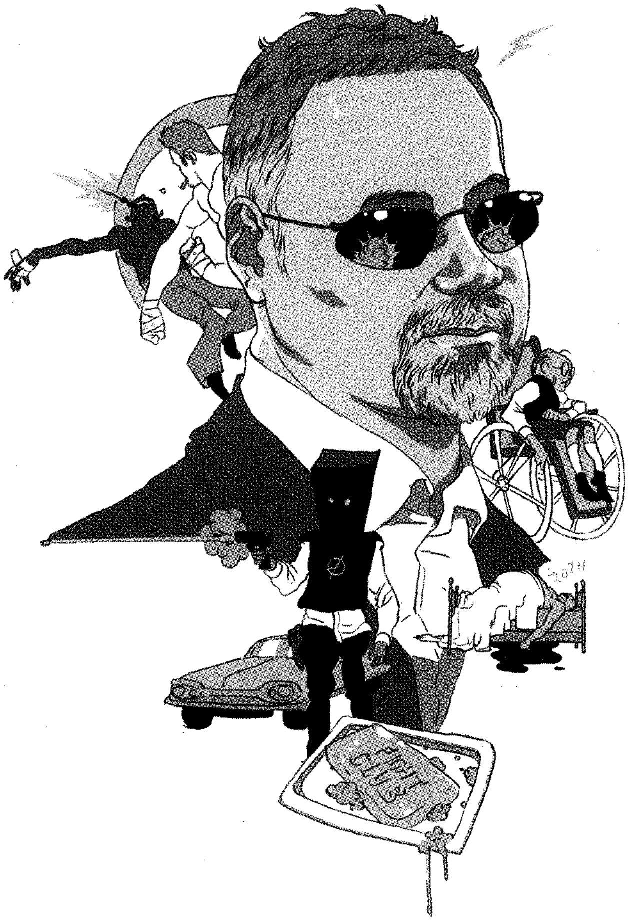
THE THREE MUSKETEERS
An undiluted delight. The scale is lavish, the story is clearly told, and Douglas Fairbanks is the dartingest of D'Artagnans, energizing every scene he's in not just with an impulsive agility and swiftness but with an italicized ardor—which he often, wisely, plays for laughs. This D'Artagnan's favorite expression is "Marvelous!," and Fairbanks is pretty marvellous, too, whether he's romping over rooftops with his true love, Constance, or engaging the evil Milady de Winter in a fight for the queen's jewels, which turns into an Apache dance. Fred Niblo directed. Released in 1921. Silent.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Jan. 1 and Jan. 4.)

TWILIGHT
Isabella Swan (Kristen Stewart), a lovely, slender, self-possessed high-school junior, moves to a new school in rainy Washington State and sees a tall, inordinately pale boy, Edward Cullen (the square-jawed Robert Pattinson), glowering at her in despair. He wants her, but he cannot give way to desire. Edward, it turns out, is a vampire, but a very moral one, thirsty yet ascetic; he will drink only animal blood, he tells her, and she falls completely in love with him. In some ways, the scrupulous young man is an ideal lover: after all, many teen-age girls don't want intercourse; they want romance, and here is a boy with superhuman powers who is nevertheless sweet to his girl and protects her from harm without demanding anything in return but the chance to adore her. The director, Catherine Hardwicke ("Thirteen"), oversees some special effects that look a little cheesy, though the sunless Northwest, thick with mountain forests, is gloomily magnificent. Much of the time, Hardwicke keeps the camera close to the chaste lovers. For teens, it's blissful madness—an abstinence fable that's sexier than sex.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In wide release.)

VALKYRIE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

WALTZ WITH BASHIR
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

WENDY AND LUCY
A young woman named Wendy (Michelle Williams) arrives in Portland, Oregon, with a car, a dog, a map, and not much else. When the car breaks down, so does her plan to get to Alaska and start her life afresh. Kelly Reichardt's serene and cautious movie tracks her heroine around town, feeling its way along the margins of society, and noting both the brush-offs and the minor acts of charity that greet a person in need. Single incidents, such as the attempt to steal a few cans of dog food, ripple outward into larger changes, and the most unglamourous spots, like the rest room at a gas station, acquire the consolation of a refuge. With her cap of black hair and a bandaged ankle, Williams comes close at times to a wounded blankness, and she cracks only a couple of smiles, as if wary of more flagrant emotions; the hesitant friendship she forges with a Walgreens security guard (Walter Dalton) is the strongest bond in the film. What rescues it from tedium is the work of Sam Levy, the director of photography, who finds a formal, unhurried beauty in the storefronts and train yards of Portland, seeking out those patches of America where too many recent movies fear to tread.—*A.L.* (In limited release.)


At Walter Reade, a series of films by David Fincher.

TOMER HANUKA

THE WRESTLER
A straightforward tale, given tremendous extra punch by its leading man. Mickey Rourke, whose career was long ago laid to rest, rises again to play Randy (the Ram) Robinson, a wrestler whose own career has tumbled from a high of twenty years before. No one else, it seems fair to say, could have played the part; for one thing, no one but Rourke combines a gently spoken sweetness with so glazed and inflated a physique, together with a willingness to be treated by his peers like a veal chop. The scenes in the ring, in which Randy, despite a heart attack, struggles to prolong the dregs of his appeal, are often hard to take; but even more agonizing are his attempts to forge enduring bonds with his estranged daughter (Evan Rachel Wood) and a tired stripper (Marisa Tomei). The film has a grainy, bloodied sadness that slips at times into the sentimental; but the director, Darren Aronofsky, knows precisely where the heart of the story beats, and that confidence is a refreshing change after the drippy meanderings of his previous film, "The Fountain." There is nothing less mystical, or more moving, than to watch the Ram reduced to serving at a deli counter: a good man at the end of the line.—*A.L.* (12/15/08) (In wide release.)

YES MAN
There's more than meets the eye in this comedy, though that's not saying much. It starts promisingly enough, as Carl Allen (Jim Carrey), a depressed divorcé and junior bank officer, spurns his friends and mopes alone. He falls under the sway of a self-help guru (Terence Stamp), whose exhortations to say yes to everything and everyone launch Carl on a series of frenetic misadventures—which, of course, come out right in the end. He finds a quirky girlfriend (Zooey Deschanel), gets promoted at work, learns to fly a plane and to speak Korean, and makes lots of new friends. Would that the results were both funnier and more cohesive. Carrey has lost little of his mercurial humor, but he gives away nothing beneath it; the script squanders its biggest possibilities (concerning Carl's role in the bank's downsizing), and there's no visual comedy to speak of. The director, Peyton Reed, however, is onto something: his depiction of modern America's limited range of options—sullen solitude or frenzied activity, bitter secrecy or bland openness—suggests nothing less than a world gone Facebook.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

Also Playing

BEDTIME STORIES: In wide release. **LAST CHANCE HARVEY:** In limited release. **MARLEY AND ME:** In wide release. **SEVEN POUNDS:** In wide release. **THE SPIRIT:** In wide release. **THE TALE OF DESPEREAUX:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Special screenings. Dec. 31-Jan. 1 at 1: "Hoppity Goes to Town" (1941, Max Fleischer). ♦ The films of Preston Sturges. Dec. 31-Jan. 1 at 2:40, 6:15, and 10: "The Lady Eve" (1941). ♦ Dec. 31-Jan. 1 at 4:30 and 8:10: "The Palm Beach Story" (1942). ♦ In revival. Jan. 2-8 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:40, 7:50, and 9:50: "Bigger Than Life" (1956, Nicholas Ray).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Jan. 1-4 at 11 A.M.: "You Can't Take It with You" (1938, Frank Capra). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Jan. 2-3: "El Topo" (1970, Alejandro Jodorowsky; in Spanish).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—The films of Agnieszka Holland. Dec. 31 at 5:30: "A Lonely Woman" (1981; in Polish). ♦ Dec. 31 at 7:45: Episodes of "The Wire" (2004-08). ♦ Jan. 1 at 6: "Angry Harvest" (1985; in German). ♦ Jan. 1 at 8:30 and Jan. 3 at 1: "Anna" (1987, Yurek Bogayevicz). ♦ Jan. 2 at 6 and Jan. 4 at 6:30: "Olivier Olivier" (1992; in French). ♦ Jan. 2 at 8:30: "Europa Europa" (1991; in German, Polish, and Russian). ♦ Jan. 4 at 3:30 and Jan. 5 at 8: "The Offsiders" (2008, Kasia Adamik; in Polish). ♦ Special screening. Dec. 31 at 6:30: "Blithe Spirit" (1945, David Lean). ♦ The films of Douglas Fairbanks. Jan. 1 at 4:30 and Jan. 2 at 3: "Reaching for the Moon" (1931, Ed-

mund Goulding). ♦ Jan. 1 at 6:30 and Jan. 4 at 2:30: "The Three Musketeers" (†). ♦ Jan. 2 at 5 and Jan. 3 at 1: "Mr. Robinson Crusoe" (1932, Edward Sutherland). ♦ Jan. 3 at 5: "In Again, Out Again" (1917, John Emerson; silent). ♦ Jan. 3 at 6:45: "The Nut" (1921, Theodore Reed; silent). ♦ Jan. 3 at 8:30: "The Private Life of Don Juan" (1934, Alexander Korda). ♦ Jan. 4 at 1: "Flirting with Fate" (1916, W. Christy Cabanne; silent). ♦ Jan. 4 at 5:45: "Down to Earth" (1917, Emerson; silent). ♦ Jan. 5 at 6: "American Aristocracy" (1916, Lloyd Ingraham; silent). ♦ Jan. 5 at 8:15: "The Thief of Bagdad" (1924, Raoul Walsh; silent). ♦ "The Contenders." Jan. 2 at 7 and Jan. 5 at 6: "Standard Operating Procedure" (2008, Errol Morris).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Jan. 2 at 8: "The Furies" (†), introduced by the actor Brian Cox.

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—The films of Martin Scorsese. Dec. 31 at 1: "Raging Bull" (1980). ♦ Dec. 31 at 3:30 and 8:45: "New York, New York" (1977). ♦ Dec. 31 at 6:30: "Taxi Driver" (1976). ♦ "Under the Sign of Fincher," films directed or selected by David Fincher. Jan. 1 at 2:40 and 8: "Se7en" (1995). ♦ Jan. 1 at 5:15: "Mary Poppins" (1964, Robert Stevenson). ♦ Jan. 2 at 3:15 and 8:15: "Fight Club" (1999). ♦ Jan. 2 at 6: "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" (1969, George Roy Hill). ♦ Jan. 3 at 2 and 8: "Zodiac," the director's cut (2007). ♦ Jan. 3 at 5:15: "Chinatown" (1974, Roman Polanski). ♦ Jan. 4 at 3: "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" (2008). ♦ Jan. 4 at 7:30: "Behind Button," David Fincher in discussion with the critic and programmer Kent Jones. ♦ Special screening. Jan. 5 at 1, 3:30, 6, and 8:30: "Playtime," in 70-mm. (†).

READINGS AND TALKS

NEW YEAR'S DAY MARATHONS
The Poetry Project kicks off its thirty-fifth annual reading at 2. Some hundred and forty performers, including Patti Smith, Cecil Taylor, Steve Earle, Jonas Mekas, Anne Waldman, Lee Ranaldo, and Taylor Mead, are expected. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-0910.) Over at the Bowery Poetry Club, also starting at 2, an equal number of like-minded artists gather for a spoken-word spectacle, now in its fifteenth year. (308 Bowery. 212-614-0505.)

CORNELIA STREET CAFÉ
The poets Kat Georges, Peter Carlaftes, Angelo Verga, and Ryan Buynak pay tribute to the writer Charles Bukowski. Fittingly, admission includes a free drink. (29 Cornelia St. Tickets at the door. Jan. 2 at 6.)

"SUNDAYS AT SUNNY'S"
Mac Montandon, whose latest book is "Jetpack Dreams: One Man's Up and Down (but Mostly Down) Search for the Greatest Invention That Never Was," joins Steven Johnson, the author of "The Invention of Air: A Study of Science, Faith, Revolution, and the Birth of America," and the novelist Amy Shearn ("How Far Is the Ocean from Here") for an afternoon reading in Red Hook, Brooklyn. (253 Conover St. Jan. 4 at 3. For more information, call BookCourt, at 718-875-3677.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

NEW YEAR'S RAMBLE
The historian Philip E. Schoenberg and his staff lead end-of-the-year tours of the Brooklyn Bridge. Schoenberg, a professor at Queens College, is a font of information about the bridge. Some three hundred ambulatory revellers joined the tour last year, but that's nowhere near the record number of people to walk across the span on one day. Schoenberg says that a quarter of a million people crossed it on Columbus Day in 1892. He started the holiday walks fourteen years ago because, he says, "it was just something to do, basically." On New Year's Eve, that rationale applies to any number of activities. Walking over the bridge may be one of the best ways to stay out of trouble. Snacks and goody bags will be provided. (For more information, call 888-699-2550, or visit www.nycwalks.com. Dec. 31, starting at 10:15 P.M.)

AUTEUR, AUTEUR
The director David Fincher's new movie, "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," starring Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett, makes remarkable use of digital technology to tell a story of intimate romance based on the fantastic premise of a man who is born old and, as the years pass, grows younger. The transformations of the F. Scott Fitzgerald story from which the film is adapted are equally surprising. The Walter Reade Theatre is presenting a Fincher mini-retrospective (see Movies), and on Jan. 4 at 7:30 the critic Kent Jones talks with the director about the making of the film. (Rose Hall, Broadway at 60th St. 212-875-5610.)

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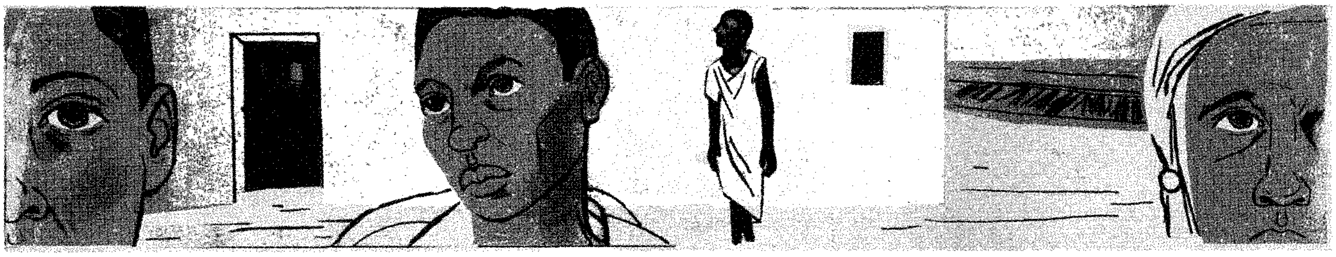
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.


Jonathan Torgovnik's photographs, at Aperture.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
JEWISH NEW YEAR
Jan. 14–29

The documentaries in Walter Reade's Jewish Film Festival include the three-hour-long "Being Jewish in France," which examines events from the Dreyfus affair to recent acts of anti-Semitism, and "A Road to Mecca: The Journey of Muhammad Asad," about an Austrian Jew who converted to Islam and helped to found modern Pakistan. Among the dramatic features in the program is "The Return of Nathan Becker," from 1932, the only Soviet Yiddish-language talking film. (212-875-5610.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
EAST IS EAST
Jan. 25

Life behind the Berlin Wall could be precarious, but the musical scene in postwar East Germany was full of daring souls. "Music of the Other Germany," Leon Botstein's next concert with the American Symphony Orchestra, highlights works by such composers as Hanns Eisler, Paul Dessau, and Rudolf Wagner-Régeny. (212-868-9276.)

THE THEATRE
WAR STORIES
Jan. 27

The New Group presents Eugene O'Neill's 1931 trilogy, "Mourning Becomes Electra," the first complete revival in New York in seventy-five years. Lili Taylor and Jena Malone star. (212-279-4200.)

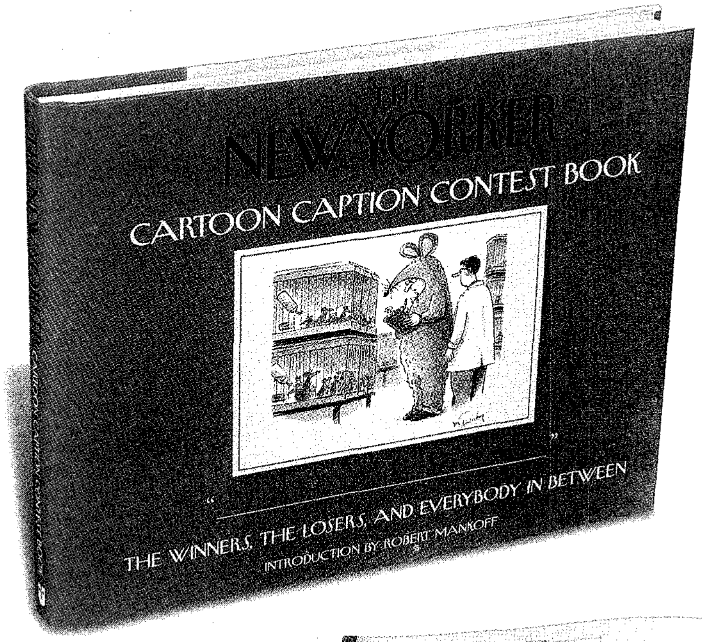
ART
FAMILY MATTERS
Feb. 20–May 7

In 2006, the photojournalist Jonathan Torgovnik began taking pictures of Rwandan mothers and the children they conceived as a result of sexual violence perpetrated during the 1994 genocide. Images from Torgovnik's series "Intended Consequences" will be exhibited at Aperture, alongside interviews. (212-505-5555.)

NIGHT LIFE
NO MESSING
Feb. 28

March 2 is Texas Independence Day; the Lone Star troubadour Robert Earl Keen is coming to Terminal 5 for what's being billed as a first annual celebration. (212-307-7171.)

THE WINNERS, THE LOSERS,
AND EVERYBODY IN BETWEEN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INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT MANKOFF

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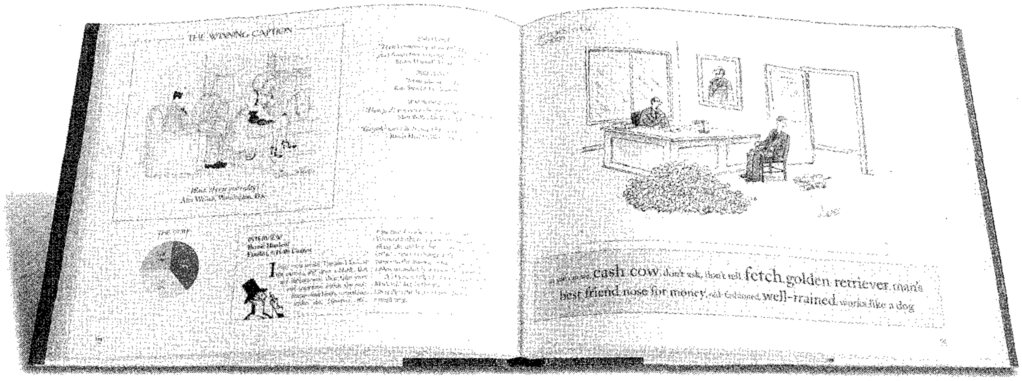
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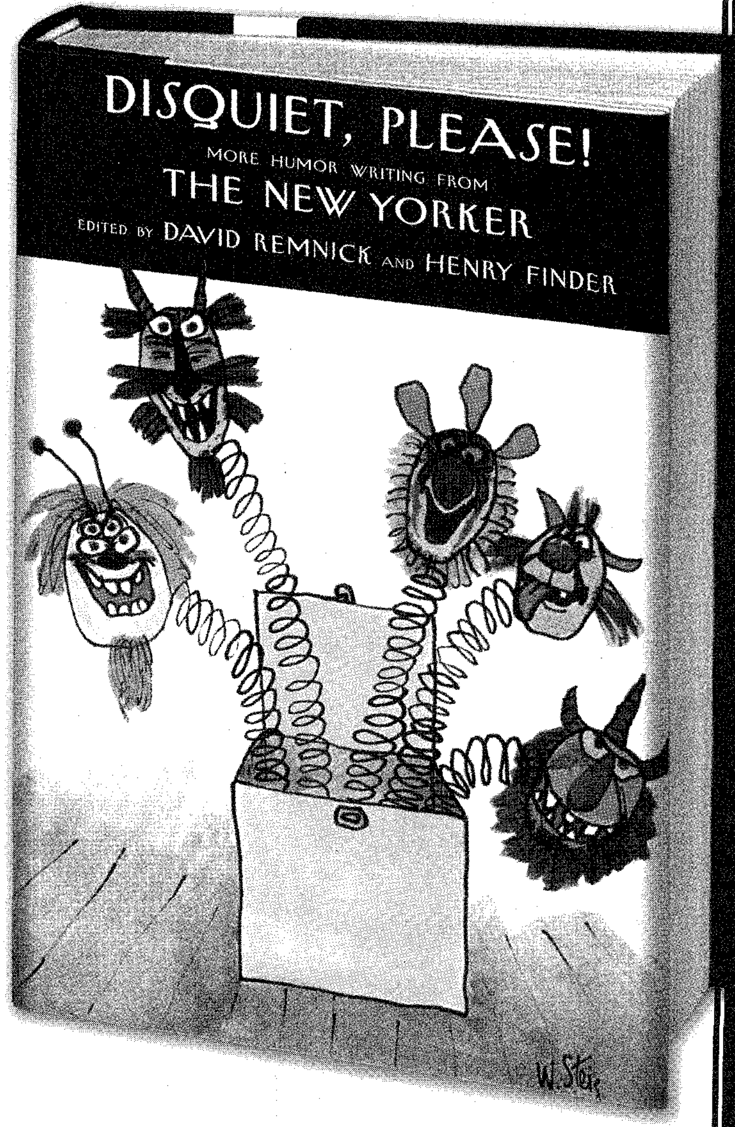
AND MANY OTHERS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THE
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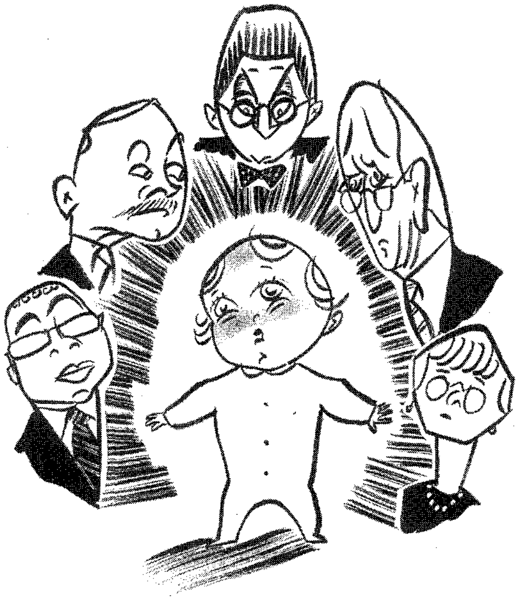
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
BREATHERS

Every parent knows the moment when a small child hits his forehead on a doorknob, or bumps her chin on the coffee table, and then the long seconds of red-faced anticipation, breath drawn, while everyone waits for the explosion of tears. The moment lasts maybe ten seconds but feels like years, and though the inevitable explosion is, mostly, inevitable, a small part of the parent's heart hopes that this time the child will somehow compose herself, see that her injury isn't life-threatening, take a breath, find distraction in a bright, shiny object, and laugh. The response isn't a reflex—a reflex kicks in, boom, like that—but it isn't exactly a rational decision, either. It's an emotional process, one that takes in the costs of crying, the necessity of letting the room know about the injury, the extent of the insult to the child's dignity, and the proximity of something more interesting in the kid's line of vision.

The present moment—this strange moment of our common life, suspended between the fall of financial capital and the crowning of a new hope—is something like that waiting-for-the-crying-to-start moment. (Not a few of us are crying already—though, as the rule of life dictates, it's mostly the little kids who got pushed rather than the big bullies who pushed them.) On the one hand, we have all bumped our foreheads, hard, on the edge of reality. But how bad will the bruise, and the bawling, really be?

Economies are emotional processes. The child's gasp is its first try at an economic act, with utility, emotion, fear, and calculation all boxed up in a single red-faced package. Consumers have stopped consuming, the papers say, for the same reason that the child has decided to cry: I'm really damaged, we want the world to know; attention *must* be paid. The stimulus package to come is meant to serve as our shiny distraction on the horizon, to induce us to think, O.K., maybe it's not that bad—I may as well take a breath and shop. When you turn to wise men for wisdom now, you learn that feelings—the interplay of fear and faith—generally trump rational economic decisions. The psychology of bump and wait and cry, it turns out, always trumps political economy—or, rather, it is political economy.



Far from adjusting our expenditures to the needs of the moment, it seems, we tend to wildly overswing, according to our mood. The difference between the provident ant, who cautiously saves up for winter, and the carefree grasshopper, dancing and hopping, is a matter of what Keynes called "animal spirits." It is better for the common lot if each of us is a hopper (and a shopper) rather than a hoarder. Being a nation of grasshoppers is allied to being a nation of hope.

The seasonal classics demonstrate the same truth. In "It's a Wonderful Life," George Bailey's Building & Loan is, let us recall, the reckless banker of Bedford Falls, giving what would now be called subprime mortgages to people like Mr. Martini, who would be better off renting. And it is mean, miserable old Mr. Potter who berates Bailey for the practice. "And what does that get us?" Potter asks. "A discontented, lazy rabble instead of a thrifty working class." But George's answer speaks to the larger emotional notion of what makes economies work and what economies are for: "Doesn't it make them better citizens? Doesn't it make them better customers? . . . Just remember this, Mr. Potter, that this rabble you're talking about . . . they do most of the working and paying and living and dying

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

in this community. Well, is it too much to have them work and pay and live and die in a couple of decent rooms and a bath?"

What we missed in holiday seasons past is that Potter, snarling and bald, was *right*. George was making a lot of imprudent loans. But George was right, too. Prudence is a virtue, but it's not a precondition for prosperity, or a practical cure for hard times. When George and Uncle Billy prevent a run on the bank by urging people to withdraw not all the money they had invested in the Building & Loan but just what they need to tide them over, he is persuading them to act not as rational-economic man but as social-emotional man. What makes Bedford Falls thrive is people feeling good about its future. George Bailey is a Capraesque Keynesian through and through, encouraging consumption rather than thrift, and hope rooted in the common purpose rather than fear rooted in the impoverishment of capital. (For the past few years, of course, Potter's grandson has been living in Tribeca and slicing up Bedford Falls mortgages into tranches for sale in Düsseldorf, while George's granddaughter has been running the Costco outside Bedford Falls, but the lesson is the same.)

An economy is not a rational model; it's an emotional muddle. It depends on how you feel about your neighbors, about next year's hopes, and about Mr. Martini. Which is why another new President once warned against fearing fear, and why the only thing that can cause us to panic now is panic. There is something faintly encouraging, just barely hopeful, in the human familiarity of the counsel being given by the Keynesian economists. For what they are telling us is just what the parent, in that long bad moment, wishes for the child: Take a deep breath. Look at the ornaments! Don't cry.

—*Adam Gopnik*

SECRET AGENT DEPT.
WHISTLE-BLOWER

Pamela Davis, blond suburban mother of three, was told that her bra would be the best place to wear the wire that kick-started a long investigation into Chicago graft and that ultimately caught the governor of Illinois trying to sell Barack Obama's Senate seat. Davis is the president and C.E.O. of Edward Hospital, in Naperville, Illinois. She is proud of the fact that on her twenty-year watch the hospital has grown from a hundred-and-sixty-two-bed community facility to a four-hundred-and-twenty-seven-bed regional medical center that leads the county in babies delivered.

Back in 2003, Davis was trying to get approval for a new medical office building from the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board. A night or two before a hearing was to be held, Davis recalled, something strange happened. A business acquaintance of hers, Nicholas Hurtgen, then a managing director of the Chicago office of Bear Stearns, called her at home and told her that unless she agreed to use a certain contractor she should pull her building request, because it wasn't going to be approved.

She ignored the warning and went off to the board hearing, where she was surprised to find that her request was denied. "I was humiliated," she said. "They were mean. So I walk off, and then a different guy comes up to me and he says, 'We *told* you to pull your project. Call me.' And right then I decided to call the F.B.I."

At first, the agents she contacted thought she was a crank. "I could tell they were laughing at me. Most people who call the F.B.I. are crazies. So they sort of humored me and said, 'O.K., we will come out and listen once.'"

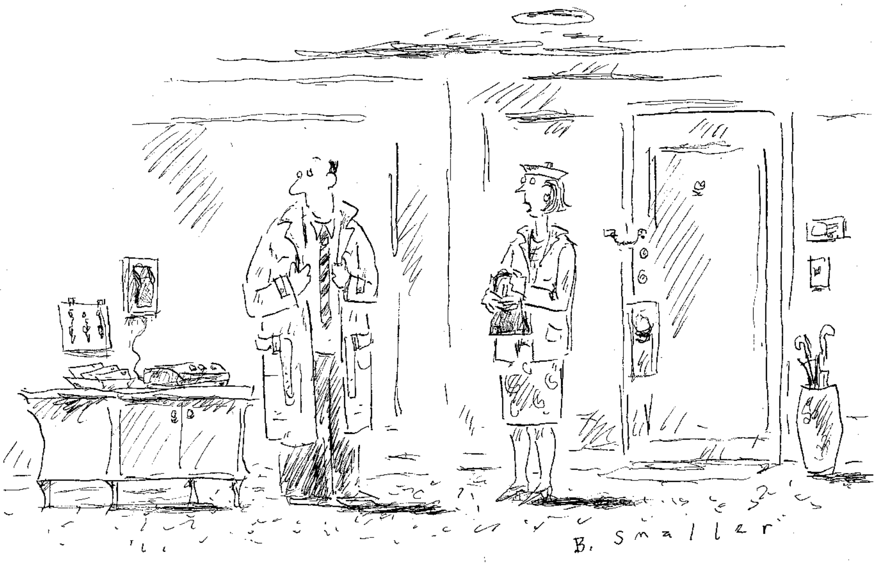
A few days later, three F.B.I. agents met her at her office, bugged her phone, and outfitted her with the wire to put in her bra. Then they set up camp in a van in the parking garage and waited. "They said, 'You tell nobody *anything*, not even your husband.' They were laughing at me and I was laughing at them."

The agents had instructed Davis to invite Hurtgen and Jacob Kiferbaum, the contractor whom he had mentioned over the phone, to meet at her office. When they arrived, the F.B.I. men listened in on the conversation from the van.

As Davis recalled, "They say, 'We told you to pull the project.' And I say, 'Yeah, why do I need you?' And they start saying, 'If you don't hire us, you will never get this project approved.' After about five minutes, my phone rings, and now the three F.B.I. guys in the parking garage are saying, 'It's extortion! It's extortion!' They yell, 'Get 'em out! Get 'em out!' So I hang up the phone.

"Now everybody is looking at me. These guys have driven two hours to have a meeting with me. And I say to them, 'I am so sorry, I have a family emergency.' I'm making this up as I go along. After that, I had the three stooges in the garage telling me they'd help me."

That episode helped start United States Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald's Operation Board Games. For the next seven months, Pamela Davis, hospital administrator, became Pamela Davis, secret agent, helping to expose a multimillion-dollar scam that at times resembled a spinoff of "The Sopranos," guest-starring the back



"If the Obama transition team is interested, they'll leave a message."

office from "Grey's Anatomy." Davis attended long lunches and boozy dinners with crooked businessmen, listening (and taping) as they talked of grafting off the hospital industry. She would slip the tapes to her F.B.I. handlers at Marshall Field's makeup counters in malls around suburban Chicago.

Davis taped all sorts of incriminating conversations, but she never quite got used to spycraft. "The wire is a little tiny square thing I put inside my bra. I thought it would fall out all the time," she said. "Oh, the logistics of getting this stuff done! One morning, I had to meet one of the F.B.I. guys in my office at 6 A.M. so he could hook up a wire to tap my phone. He was under my desk, on the floor. It looks kinky! My administrative assistant pops her head in, and there's this man under my desk, and she says, 'Oh, my goodness,' and leaves. And I go, 'What am I supposed to tell her?' He says, 'I don't know. That never happened to me before.'"

Eventually, the "bad guys," as Davis calls them, told her she could build her new building if she agreed to add several million dollars to the deal for Kiferbaum. "The F.B.I. said, 'Sign it—it makes the case better.' But I couldn't do that. How could I possibly sign something like that and cost my organization money? I didn't know what the hell to do." (The F.B.I. was unable to comment.)

Davis got a court order allowing her to hire a lawyer and to tell her hospital-board chairman what she was up to. After seven months, the Chicago *Sun-Times* published her name in a blind item about an ongoing corruption investigation, and Davis's role in the case was over. Her tapes of Stuart Levine, a corrupt health-board member, helped lead to his becoming a federal witness in the trial of Antoin (Tony) Rezko. (Kiferbaum pleaded guilty to attempted extortion in 2005. Hurtgen maintains his innocence, and his lawyer disputed Davis's account.)

As Fitzgerald's probe widened, more wiretaps were put in place, and more corruption was exposed. Eventually, the governor of Illinois was recorded discussing the sale of Obama's Senate seat. Davis, who describes herself as a political independent, says she's disgusted with politics now, although she did vote for Obama. And she still hasn't received state approval for her hospital expansion.

—*Nina Burleigh*

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

SHAGGY-DOG STORY

The thinking used to be that a dog would provide security, not require it. But this was before Paris Hilton's Chihuahua, Tinkerbell, went missing, in 2004. ("They'll hold it for ransom," Hilton said at the time. "Everyone knows I'm rich, so they'll want millions.") It was before Trouble, Leona Helmsley's white Maltese, inherited, in quick succession, twelve million dollars, a series of death threats, and a six-figure bodyguard detail. It was before the former *Post* publisher Ken Chandler and his wife responded to the disappearance of their blond dachshund, Gus, by hiring a publicist and a private detective. And it was before the subject of the Secret Service's future canine charge became a national fixation.

There are no reliable statistics about dog thefts, either citywide or nationwide, but a couple of years ago Lisa Peterson, of the American Kennel Club, took it upon herself to begin monitoring what she saw as a disturbing trend. Her list of the disappeared includes not only Samantha, a Maltese from Brooklyn; Misha, a bichon frise from Flushing; and Enzo, a Yorkie from Chappaqua (later returned to his owner, former Miss America Vanessa Williams), but also LeeLoo, a poodle from Sugar Land, Texas; Bean, a pit bull from Durham, North Carolina; Pixie, a pug from Bolingbrook, Illinois; and more than two hundred others in twenty-four states.

And then, several weeks ago, dognapping terror hit the Upper West Side. E-mails began circulating (one subject line: "DOGNAPPING attempts in NYC with RAZOR and RANSOM—get dogs ON LEASHES—happening on West Side"), and flyers were posted at dog runs and veterinary offices and pet stores ("COMMUNITY ALERT: DOGNAPPING attempts on the West Side"). Dog owners, particularly women with small dogs—said to be the prime target—began to panic.

A survey of Upper West Side dog runs and pet stores turned up various versions of the same story. "There's a two-man team, with one in a gray hoodie on a bicycle who comes by and slices the leash with a razor, then goes away with the dog. The other guy calls you up later on and says, 'Hey, I found your dog! What's it worth to you?'" said Charlie Allen, the owner of Gotham Pups pet services, who was glumly watching two of his charges (Beezus, a mutt, and Delta, a yellow Labrador) romp across the dog run on West Eighty-first Street the other day. "It's completely unpleasant."

Most people were saying that the dognappers made their ransom demands by calling the number on a stolen dog's tags. Either that or they waited for a reward sign to be posted. "I think maybe in this neighborhood there would be more purebreds and more people who would pay a ransom," Jason Frix (Billy Bob, bullmastiff) said. "Crime increases in tough times." People said there'd been dognappings in other nice neighborhoods. "I heard Chelsea," someone said. "Also Battery Park City."

Marilyn Pasekoff (Hogan, German shepherd), who was walking in Riverside Park, said that the dognappers might be supplying research labs. "My vet gave me a book on what a burgeoning industry that is—collecting dogs and giving them to laboratories for experiments." And Allison Rowey (Billy, Pomeranian) had heard that the dogs were being stolen for illegal dogfights. "They've been getting smaller dogs to practice the big dogs on," she said.

The police hadn't received a single dognapping report. "It's been two weeks now, and no one's come in," Officer Clark Tiger, of the Twentieth Precinct, said. "Nothing like that's ever happened in this neighborhood before." But, still, local residents were focussing on preventive measures. Emily Emmett (Dahlia, Border terrier) said she'd heard people say, "Don't leave your dog outside Starbucks. And don't use leashes that people can slice through." Emmett said that she hadn't seen a dog left unattended anywhere on the Upper West Side in at least two weeks. She had bought a thick leather leash to replace her dog's lightweight nylon one.

"I'm paranoid," Becca Yuré (Hudson, mutt) said as she left the Pet Health Store on Amsterdam, having just picked out a heavy new leash. "I almost bought two, so that if they cut one he'll still be on one." The store was selling lots of leashes. Meanwhile, back in Riverside Park, Penny Mandel (Becky and Polly, cockapoos) said, "I am aware when someone comes by on a bike—I keep an eye on them, and pull the leash tight."

Taking pet dogs hostage is not a new idea. As the social reformer Henry Mayhew wrote, in 1861, it was a popular racket in Victorian London. Nappers used a piece of liver or a bitch in heat to lure dogs from their owners, whereupon financial negotiations would begin. "They steal fancy dogs ladies are fond of—spaniels, poodles, and terriers," Mayhew wrote. Among them was Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel, Flush, who was snatched and ransomed no fewer than three times. Each time, Browning dutifully paid up.

But why, in the absence of a single documented case, had a whole neighborhood in contemporary Manhattan collectively fixated on dog thievery? Corey Robin, a political-science professor at Brooklyn College and the author of "Fear: The History of a Political Idea," blamed the financial crisis. He suggested that the scare reflected "the displacement of economic anxiety." "The class that's been hit the hardest is the financial sector. And if it's small dogs that are well cared for that are the targets—well, they're a sort of boutiquey item," he said. "A small dog creates a tremendous amount of emotional attachment, but at the same time it is a luxury item—and that's being taken away."

—*Kate Julian*

INK

FIRST MEMOIRS

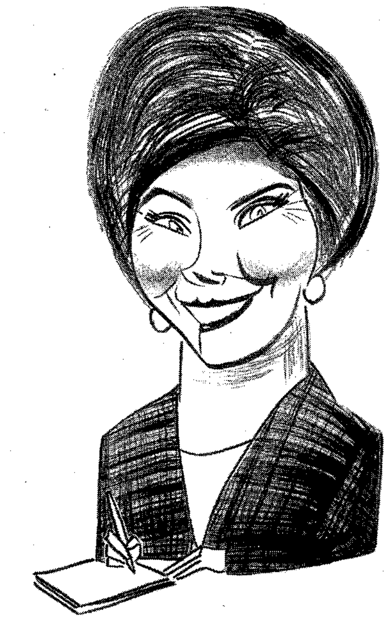
Memoirs by First Ladies are often more hotly anticipated than those by their husbands. Once the Presidential wife is liberated from the White House and has access to a skilled ghostwriter, it is hoped, she will finally have her say. The results can be broken down by genre. There is the campaign-platform memoir—Hillary Clinton's "Living History"; the score-settling version—Nancy Reagan's "My Turn"; and the memoir of ambitious co-Presidency—Rosalynn Carter's "First Lady from Plains." And then there was Betty Ford, who blazed a (perhaps unfortunate) trail with "The Times of My Life"—the addiction memoir. The next installment in the First Lady canon is still to be written.

When Laura Bush stopped in at the Council on Foreign Relations for a chat the other day, the crowd contained, in addition to the usual bankers and Park Avenue types, a contingent of sharp-elbowed publishers. Sitting in the audience was her lawyer, Robert Barnett, as well as at least four editors from prominent publishing houses. "I do think she has a story to tell," said Tim Duggan, the executive editor of HarperCollins, who had come to hear Mrs. Bush. "It's not a surprise that she's going to be the first one out of the gate." Esther Newberg, an agent at International Creative Management, who was not at the council talk, agreed. "She's the only one in the family who could get money now for a book," she said. "Is his approval rating above twenty-five? There's no question in my mind that she would get more money than him." About twenty minutes late, Mrs. Bush emerged in a prim suit and pink blouse, and took her place at the podium.

After word spread, in late November, that the First Lady's memoir was on offer, Mrs. Bush became more visible than usual, popping up on "Meet the Press" to talk about her humanitarian efforts ("Kabul is in much better shape than it has been"), making the rounds of the morning programs to discuss the White House Christmas decorations ("The theme this year is 'A Red, White and Blue Holiday'"), and even speaking with Mary Hart on "Entertainment Tonight" ("I think the bunting looks so pretty!"). And she and Barnett have been inviting publishers to the White House for meetings.

"We met with her in what seemed like an office in the Laura Bush Wing," one publisher, who flew down to Washington with several colleagues, said. "It was an hour-long meeting. I think there were at least eight of them scheduled."

One question that seems to be weighing on prospective editors is whether a book by Mrs. Bush will provide a candid account of her feelings, and perhaps counter the popular view of her as an opinion-free robot. Dan Sharp, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations who was in the audience at Mrs. Bush's speech, said, "One would hope she'd feel free to share her feelings at some point. She was right there while the disasters were happening, and she was unable to say anything. How did she feel about what was happening? What did she say to her husband? What did he say in response?"



Laura Bush

According to Mrs. Bush's spokeswoman, Sally McDonough, "She's going to write a book about the people she met and her life in the White House. It's not going to be an 'I grew up in Midland' type of book."

The reception to Mrs. Bush's pitch has been mixed so far. "She was not forthcoming about anything that I would consider controversial," the publisher who met with her said. “We questioned her rigorously, but it was one-word answers. I considered it the worst, or the most frustrating, meeting of its sort that I’ve ever had.” He added, “But she really couldn’t have been nicer.” He said that his company would not be making an offer on the book, which was expected to sell for a couple of million dollars.

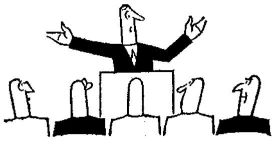
“I chose not to meet with her,” a publisher at another company said. “I got the impression that everyone was totally underwhelmed by her. That’s why there’s so little buzz.”

Another publishing executive said that some of the editors who met Mrs. Bush were hoping to find “that she’s a closet Democrat, like in the Curtis Sittenfeld novel.” (Sittenfeld’s novel “American Wife,” which was purported to be inspired by Mrs. Bush’s life, portrayed the First Lady as passionately pro-choice and periodically agonizing over her husband’s hawkishness.) When the publisher who went to the White House was asked what impression of Mrs. Bush’s politics he came away with, he sighed and said, “You got the sense she’s just like him.”

Even Curtis Sittenfeld, who spent months researching Mrs. Bush’s life story, is conflicted about the hypothetical memoir. “Do you remember after Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston separated, it was more interesting to wonder what Aniston thought than to find out what she thinks?” Sittenfeld said over the phone last week. “Sometimes when people share their thoughts it’s sort of disappointing.”

—*Sheelah Kolhatkar*

SECOND ACTS
HERDING DOLLS



Three hundred and eighty-five days after Trent Lott, the minority whip, announced that he would resign from the Senate—“Trish and I have decided that it’s time to do something else,” he said, explaining that his decision to step down had been inspired by Ecclesiastes 3:1—Lott was in New York City, doing something else. Dressed in a navy blazer, gray slacks, and a lavender tie, along with tasselled loafers and a class ring with a Sigma Nu insignia, he had arrived at the 3 West Club, where he was scheduled to speak. “My wife made me follow her around Saks Fifth Avenue. I was exhausted! I did finally find me a chair,” he said, during cocktail hour. “And then we went to the American Girl store,” he continued. “It’s a really sweet thing, because you’ve got the mothers and all the little girls, and then you’ve got some daddies and the little girls. I just backed over in the corner while my wife was placing her order and watched the people. It’s really neat.”

Lott used to live in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and Washington, D.C., but Hurricane Katrina destroyed the Pascagoula house—“my historic beach residence,” as he referred to it in his memoir, “Herding Cats” (the title is a reference to Lott’s skill at corralling votes). Since then, he and his wife have shuttled between the capital and a farmhouse in Jackson that they fixed up with the flood-insurance money. In the memoir, which was published by ReganBooks in 2005, and which attempted to vindicate Lott’s comments defending the onetime segregationist senator Strom Thurmond, Lott was sometimes hard on Yankees. He recalled meeting several Yale professors while he was in law school at Ole Miss. “They were young and personable,” he wrote. “But they were also liberal and had an attitude problem.” Still, he insisted that he has an affinity with New Yorkers. “I kind of bonded a little bit more with New York City after 9/11,” he said. “I came up here and went down to Ground Zero and we held a press conference, and I remember telling the people, ‘We will get you the support that you’re entitled to.’” So far on his vacation, Lott, a founding member of the Singing Senators barbershop quartet, has seen “Jersey Boys” (“Loved that. It was fantastic”). He and his wife were staying at the Sofitel, near Times Square. “I usually like to eat where we’re staying,” Lott said. “We had a reservation last night at the Sofitel, so we had French cuisine, and French wine.”

With the former senator John Breaux, and both of their sons, Lott is now a partner in the lobbying firm the Breaux Lott Leadership Group. The Old Testament, it turns out, was not the only thing on his mind when he embarked on his second career. “After Katrina, I needed to get out and do something else, where I could make some money and do something for my family,” he said. (This year, the Breaux Lott Leadership Group has disclosed income of $5.67 million from lobbying activities.) Lott, who once complained that, in the Senate, “sometimes we didn’t get home until after ten,” seemed to be enjoying his new gig, which is more relaxed than Congress, if perhaps not relaxed enough for him. “The cons are, first of all, it’s not retirement!” he said. He continued, “I tell people I pretty much do what I’ve always done, only I get paid for it now.”

Eventually, Lott took a seat on a dais, where Joseph Pascal, the president of the Hudson Union Society, attempted to conduct a Q.&A. “Thank you very much, Joe,” Lott began. “In the Senate, we have no rules on when you can speak, so I’ll begin my filibuster now!” Thirty minutes later, Lott was still talking: Gerald Ford (“He wasn’t fancy, he wasn’t gonna be a Rhodes Scholar, but he was maybe what we needed at the time”), Bill Clinton (“He was across the creek from me”), Trish (“She should have been Miss America, but she wound up losing the Miss Mississippi contest”), his former job as majority leader (“the toughest job in Washington, the toughest—even tougher than the President’s”).

Once the audience managed to get in a few Q’s to Lott’s A’s, there was no serious subject he could not deflect with a homespun crack. On corruption: “I always said, ‘If you don’t have ethics and morals before you come to Washington, you ain’t gonna grow ’em in Washington.’” On the economic stimulus plans: “The congressmen and senators will have a field day putting in earmarks, and if I were there I’d be putting them in!” He continued, “One year, I was actually the Prince of Pork in the Senate. I never got to be King—that kinda hurt my feelings.”

John Brademas, the president emeritus of N.Y.U. and a former congressman, rose to rib his old colleague. “I happen to be a Democrat, he’s a Republican, but I was brought up in the Methodist Church to believe that it’s never too late to be saved,” he said.

“But don’t you believe you can fall from grace?” Lott replied, chuckling. Then somebody asked a question about the auto bailout, and Lott started talking about how Ford would be just fine as long as they kept making the F-150, that “big old truck.”

—*Lauren Collins*

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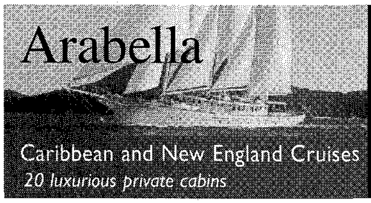
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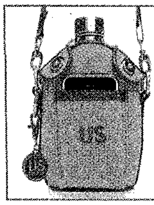

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LETTER FROM CHINA

KOSHER TAKEOUT

Supervising a food-production boom.

BY PATRICIA MARX

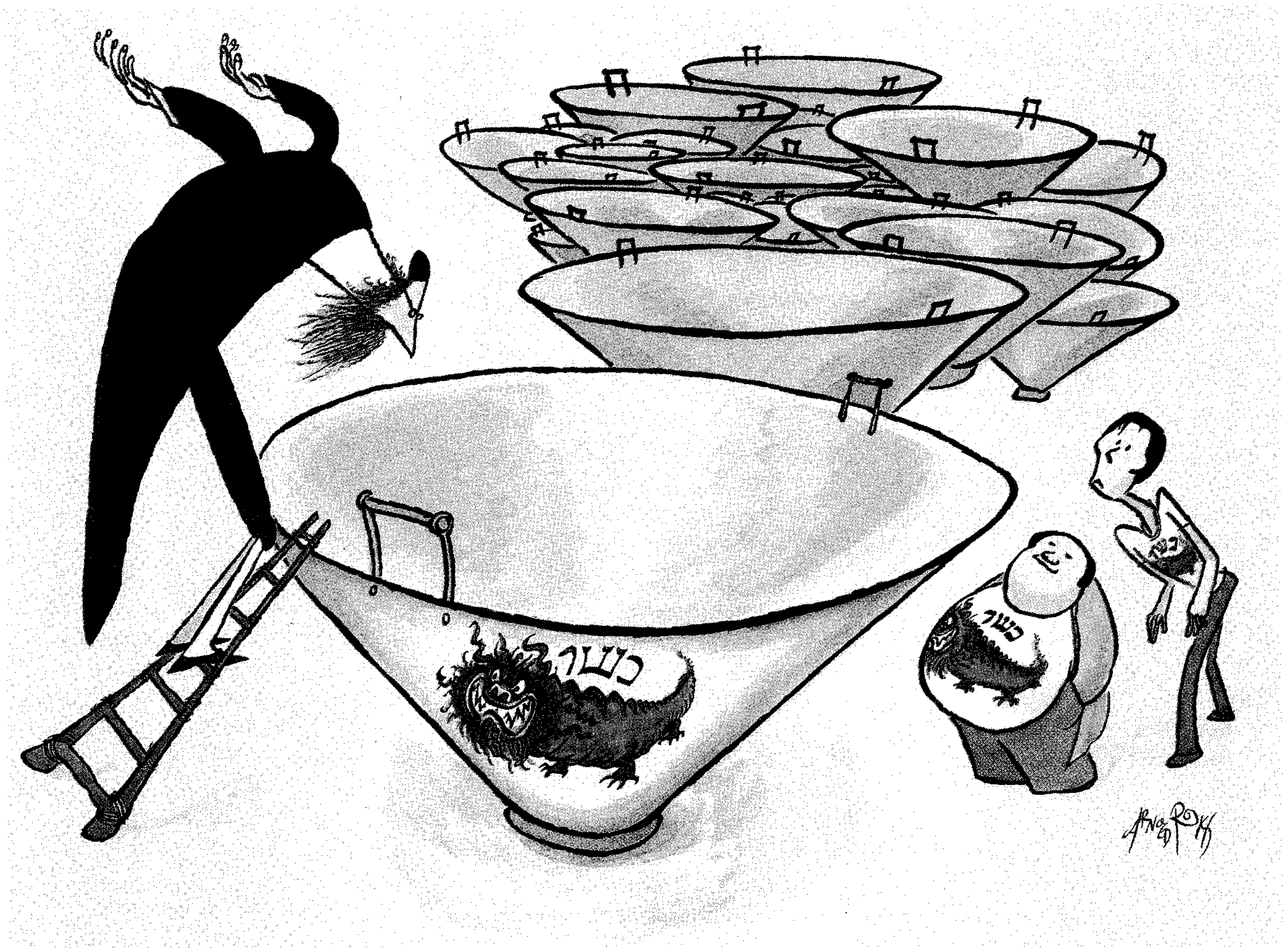
The claim that Marco Polo brought gift baskets of spaghetti home to Italy on his return from China was debunked long ago. What is true, however, is that, centuries later, Rabbi Mordechai Grunberg and Rabbi David Moskowitz, in their travels through the People's Republic, are helping to introduce millions of eaters around the world to the foodstuffs of this faraway land, even though most kosher consumers don't have any idea where their groceries come from.

Reb Grunberg and Reb Moskowitz are *mashgihim* (kosher inspectors). They, along with dozens of other *mashgihim*, have been crisscrossing China for decades, eying the goings on in hundreds of factories to insure that the ingredients and the production methods are in accord with kashruth (Jewish dietary laws). Thus, they ask: Does the fish have fins and scales? (A must.) Are the bamboo Sukkoth covers strung together with cotton string or synthetic fibres? (Only material that grows in the ground is permissible.) Is the yak milk stored in containers that might have previously held meat? (A big no-no.) If a *mashgiah* deems that the exacting standards have been met, then off to the four corners of the globe go the rice crackers, canned berries, dehydrated vegetables, frozen fruits, chocolate, tea, cooking oils, pharmaceuticals, dietary supplements, preservatives, garlic, food additives and coloring, and sundry other products. And, lo, it has come to pass that China is now the fastest-growing exporter of kosher goods on earth. And, verily, every party involved—the kosher-certifying agencies, the factory owners, the Chinese government, and the consumer—doth benefit, for I say unto you that the value of the worldwide kosher market has been estimated to be a hundred and sixty-five billion dollars per year.

Recently, I tagged along with the two rabbis as they made their rounds in China. Grunberg works for the Orthodox Union, the largest kosher-certifying agency in the world. If you look carefully, you can see the little "O" with a "U" inside that is printed on every container of Häagen-Dazs ice cream, Nabisco Saltines, Coors beer, Pillsbury Devil's Food Cake Mix, Mr. Drain Opener, and five hundred thousand other products. That is the Orthodox Union's *hechsher* (seal of approval). The first product to receive it was Heinz vegetarian beans, in 1923. The minimalist symbol was created because Heinz executives, nervous that they might put off their Gentile customers, did not want packaging that looked manifestly Jewish.

Did I say Mr. Drain Opener? Yes, I did. The O.U. does not officially frown upon a Jewish housewife unclogging her sink with a product called, say, Señor Pig Knuckles or Mrs. Shrimp. Nevertheless, certain keepers of kosher kitchens, when cleaning a surface that might touch food, prefer to use something guaranteed to be pareve (containing neither meat nor milk derivatives). There is an abundance of earnest rabbinical discussion about what is permissible under kashruth: Is it O.K. to use toothpaste that does not have a *hechsher*? What is the kosher status of water buffalo? Can dishwashers be made usable for Passover by changing the racks? Despite such issues, the basic rules, as laid down in the Torah, are (arguably) straightforward. They include proscriptions against eating meat and dairy at the same meal, consuming bug-infested fruit or vegetables (though there are those who give grasshoppers and crickets a pass), and partaking of the flesh from a beast of the earth unless it has cloven hooves and chews its cud. Were these laws designed to keep Jews (a) healthy, (b) holy, (c) isolated, (d) fat, or (e) all of the above? Savants have opined at great length about these matters, and they agree on only one thing: the answer is not (e).

Rabbi Moskowitz started his own outfit, Shatz Kosher Services, five years



"It's an honor to be Jewish in China," says a kosher inspector. "They say they would like to imitate the Jews."

ago. Today, he has dealings with more than a hundred factories in China and a few in Vietnam. The letters "SKS," which form the Shatz *hechsher*, are arranged in a circular design not unlike a monogram on wedding-present towels. Look for their endorsement on, for example, frozen fish fillets at Sam's Club.

Both Grunberg, who is fifty-six, and Moskowitz, who is thirty-nine, are from New York—Grunberg from Far Rockaway, Queens, and Moskowitz from Brooklyn, but raised in Monsey, in Rockland County. Today, both live in Israel. Each has nine children. Each spends two to three weeks every month in China, where a day might start at 5 A.M. and end at 1 A.M., and can entail up to three plane flights and many hours of automobile travel. Neither Grunberg nor Moskowitz speaks Chinese. Neither particularly cares for Chinese food.

This business of certification is a mostly twentieth-century phenomenon. In the old days, we did not need anyone to tell us if our chicken was kosher, because we slaughtered it ourselves. We made sure that, as Deuteronomy more or less instructs, our supper was done in by a knife that had no nicks, with a quick, deep stroke across the throat which severed the carotid arteries, jugular veins, vagus nerve, trachea, and esophagus, at a point no higher than the epiglottis and no lower than where the cilia begin on the trachea. After that, we made sure that all its blood was drained within seventy-two hours. Today, we would rather go to Food Emporium.

ARNOLD ROTH

It was 7 A.M. when Reb Grunberg and I hit the highway out of Shanghai in a rented S.U.V., driven by a man who spoke no English, our translator next to him in the passenger seat. We were bound for a factory in Suzhou that makes snack foods. Grunberg had been up for a couple of hours, praying and catching up on business. He wore a conservative gray suit and a black beret, which he would replace with a baseball cap while inspecting, because, as he said, "it seems more factory." He carried a black leather duffel containing his laptop and enough kosher provisions from Israel to last two weeks: twelve long-life gamma-irradiated meals that he heats up on top of the hotel kettle, some packages of instant noodle soup, sealed pouches of tuna and salmon, crackers, rice cakes, and wafers.

Grunberg's father had been an appliance repairman in Queens. "He used to bring TVs home, and we had to watch fast before the set went back to its owner," the Rabbi told me. The father had hoped that his son would become a doctor. Instead, while living in Israel between high school and college, Grunberg trained to be a *shohet* (kosher slaughterer). "I didn't see myself slaughtering for the rest of my life, though," he said. He received an undergraduate degree from Queens College in accounting, a master's in business administration from Adelphi, and rabbinical ordination from a seminary in Forest Hills. While studying to be a rabbi, he worked weekends, helping hotels kosherize their kitchens for Jewish weddings and bar mitzvahs, an undertaking that can require, among other extreme measures, blowtorching the insides of ovens.

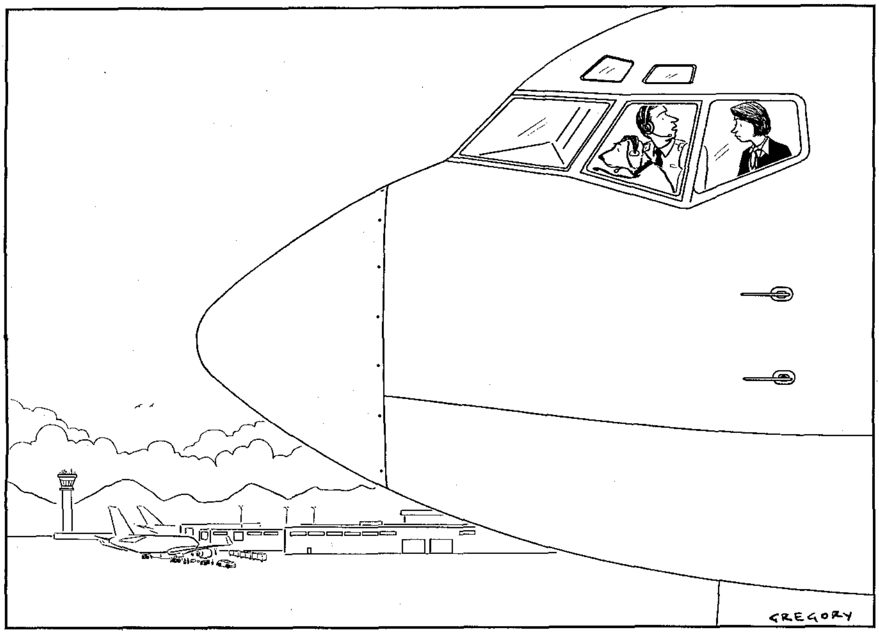
Nearly an hour had passed since we left our hotel in the city, and yet the scenery was still urban—a never-ending carpet of factories and smokestacks and high-rises. We, like everyone else on the expressway, were exceeding the seventy-five-mile-per-hour speed limit. Grunberg said that when he first came to China, in 1981, there were hardly any roads, phones, or English speakers. He had come to certify citric acid. The company agent was supposed to meet him in the lobby of a certain hotel, but Grunberg said that, when he arrived, he saw no sign of the man. He waited for a very long time. "And then," he said, "I felt something on my right leg. I looked down and it was a rat. A friendly rat. I think it wanted to be petted or fed. So I said, I'm out of here. I didn't even check in." Grunberg did not return to China for twenty years.

In 1981, there were three rabbis from the Orthodox Union assigned to China. Today, there are more than fifty *mashgihim* in the country, seven from the O.U. One and a quarter billion dollars in kosher-certified ingredients are exported worldwide from China each year. How many Chinese factories have kosher certificates? According to the Chicago *Tribune*, more than two thousand new ones have been issued in the past ten years. But both Grunberg and Moskowitz estimate that there are fifteen hundred total.

"And yet, even with all this growth, there are still misunderstandings," Rabbi Grunberg told me. On occasion, he said, a factory supervisor, meeting him for the first time, will address him as "Rabbit."

We turned off the highway and drove along a cypress-lined avenue that was being swept by men with handcrafted brooms made of willow twigs. One storefront after another was filled with stacks of metal pipes. "It's funny how you'll get an entire town that sells only one thing," Grunberg noted.

He offered everyone in the car a kosher chocolate wafer. "There are two religions in China," he said. "One is food. The other is money." He told a story about a time, a few years back, when he addressed a group of Chinese authorities whose approval he needed in order to continue working in China. Having been warned by a colleague not to bring up God during his presentation, he explained to his audience that a kosher-certified factory could potentially bring in an extra million dollars a year in revenue. "Their eyes lit up," he said. "Then one of them asked the big question: 'What is kosher law based on?' I asked him if he had ever heard of the Atkins diet. I said that Atkins wrote a diet book that's very popular in the United States. And that, similarly, Moses gave the Jews the kosher diet, with rules that are also codified. I said that, from the little I'd read about Confucius, he, too, would have done the same thing. The Chinese all smiled. And they said, 'Rabbi, even if what you're doing here is illegal, keep doing it! We're going to try to get the laws modified so you can do lots of business in China.' "



"Don't worry—he surrounds himself with good people."

We passed a golf course, and then a lake bordered by villas. At a roadside bodega, we picked up a couple of Cokes, a product that has been certified by the Orthodox Union since 1993. How can a *mashgiah* scrutinize the production of this beverage, given the vaunted secrecy of its formula? Grunberg explained that the Coca-Cola Company presents the O.U. with a long list of ingredients to be approved, including some that are red herrings, just to foil any industrial spies who might be masquerading as rabbis.

At last, we reached Jiangsu Daysun Foods, where Rabbi Grunberg was to verify that all was as it should be with Wow mix, a snack food comprising wasabi-and-soy-roasted green peas, rice, peanuts, and beans. The Jiangsu Daysun plant did not look much different from the ones we had visited the day before, Capsugel, which manufactures medical capsules, and Youi Foods, which manufactures—well, let's just say that if you like Wow mix you'll love the treats churned out by the folks at Youi.

We were shown around the factory grounds by the plant manager, Ray, a short man who stands up very tall and exudes the eagerness of an A-plus student. "We're very proud of our kosher certificate," he said, leading us across an expansive turf of symmetrically planted trees, past a basketball court and a cafeteria that serves three meals a day and a midnight snack.

Grunberg inspects Jiangsu Daysun four times a year. The initial visit to a factory usually takes several hours, but a follow-up walk-through can be accomplished in an hour. For this service, Grunberg said that the O.U. charges forty-five hundred dollars a year, with the agency bearing the expense of a *mashgiah's* transportation and lodging. Grunberg said, "Sometimes a Chinese factory will say, 'Why should we use you? You're more expensive than the others.' And I say, 'Confucius said'—not that he did say it, but he would have said—' "Would you rather work with the grandfather, the father, or the child?" ' The O.U. was the trailblazer in the industry."

How does the process of kosher-certification inspection work? Here's a composite scenario, as I witnessed it.

The Schmooze: This takes place in the conference room, which is perhaps adorned with a wood-and-brass captain's wheel from a ship. On the wall, there might be a framed certificate for "High Tech Enterprise 2006" or a large painted sign with an adage in English. "Only Faulty Product, No Captious Customer" and "People and Products Working Together" were two that I saw. Among those in attendance could be a plant supervisor, an engineer, an export manager, a sales representative, and a factory-hired translator. There is always a lot of chuckling—about what, I don't think anyone present ever has a clue. Finally, the *mashgiah* turns on his laptop, signalling that it is time for . . .

The Review of the Raw Materials: The giggles stop and the *mashgiah* inquires whether the ingredients that the manufacturer had been using during his previous inspection—preservatives, release agents, emulsifiers, and a lot of substances with initials—are the same ingredients that are being used currently. This stage involves stacks of forms and documents. If this sounds boring to you, that's because it is. But, finally, we're ready for . . .

Paper Clothes Time! Everyone puts on funny-looking disposable hats, robes, surgical masks, and elasticized shoe covers, disinfects their germ-ridden selves in a tiny room equipped with wall-mounted air-spraying nozzles, grabs a pair of earplugs, and proceeds to . . .

The Checkup: A *mashgiah* snoops around the facility, smelling this, tasting that. He is always on the lookout for ingredients that are not on the record books or procedures that might render the product trayf (non-kosher)—for instance, using a non-approved lubricant on a piece of machinery that touches food. "It's more what they don't show you than what they do," Rabbi Moskowitz said. "You break pattern. They ask you where you want to go, and maybe you say, 'I want to go to the final-product warehouse.' And then, on the way, you say, 'What is that door there?' They're not ready for that. That is where you see if something's wrong."

Like an I.R.S. auditor, a *mashgiah* is there to make sure that nobody is cheating. A *mashgiah* does not bless food. Nor is it his job to vet anything for hygiene or safety. But that may be changing. Apparently, there are only so many cartons of toothpaste, pharmaceuticals, pet foods, and milk products that can be poisoned before the big *machers* in kashruth decide that they ought to tinker with an ancient tradition. Kosher-certifying organizations, including the O.U., issued a statement saying that they will soon issue another statement saying that any Chinese company seeking their approval must comply with certain safety guidelines, which have yet to be specified. In the meantime, as Moskowitz put it, "Food scandals are always good for the kosher business."

Back at Jiangsu Daysun, Rabbi Grunberg was satisfied that the blue plastic kegs of palm oil in the warehouse were from the same source as they were last time, and that nothing was up with the maltodextrin. And he had observed the big green machines efficiently whipping glops of dough into patties, which would later be frozen, flavored, and sliced into rice crackers. Grunberg was in a hurry to get back to Shanghai. Sabbath would start at sundown, and the Rabbi was hoping to attend services at one of the three makeshift synagogues in town. There are an estimated two thousand Jews in Shanghai, though at various times in the city's past there have been many more. In the late nineteen-thirties, for instance, twenty thousand Jews escaping Nazi persecution fled to Shanghai, the only place in the world that did not require a visa. (Not long afterward, however, they were ghettoized by the Japanese, who occupied the city from 1941 to 1945. When the war was over, most of the Jews left Shanghai for Israel, the United States, or Australia.)

When did Jews first arrive in China? There are those who persist in believing that one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel settled between Tibet and Sichuan during Biblical times. Well, maybe or maybe not, but archeological records make it clear that Jews were present in China in the eighth century. In 1163, China's first known synagogue was built, in Kaifeng, in the central part of the country, where, until the mid-nineteenth century, there was a community of Jews, known by the locals as *tiao jin jiao*, which roughly means "the people who remove the sinew"—a reference to kashruth practices. Today, however, only one kosher restaurant exists in mainland China: Dini's, in Beijing. Nobody knows how many Jews are now in the country, but reasonable estimates put the number at around three thousand, which is roughly the same number of Jews as live in my apartment building.

"I'm used to people staring at me wherever I go," Rabbi David Moskowitz told me, when I first met him. Moskowitz, a large man with a bushy red beard, is usually dressed in a heavy black polyester coat, pants cropped just below the knee, high socks ("like George Washington"), and a yarmulke underneath a tall beaver hat. The Chinese, he said, in a noticeable Yiddish accent, have variously mistaken him for Pavarotti, Santa Claus, a judge, and a magician.

And when they discover he is Jewish? "The Chinese think we are the smartest people in the world, after the Chinese," he said. "They say, 'Very clever, very good at business.' It's an honor to be Jewish in China. They say they would like to imitate the Jews." Among the best-selling books in China this year were "The Jewish People's Bible for Business and Managing the World" and "The Jewish Way of Raising Children."

I went to Qingdao, a seaport in Shandong Province—Jewish population: two, if you count me—to meet Moskowitz at the apartment in which he stays when he's in China, which also functions as the headquarters of Shatz Kosher Services. It was after 10 P.M. when I arrived at the government-built stone compound and made my way to his plain suite of rooms. "Sorry," Moskowitz said, nodding at my outstretched hand, "but rabbis can't shake a woman's hand. The saying goes that I can only shake my wife's hand."

"But you can be alone with me in an apartment?" I asked.

"The question is," he said, " 'What is alone?' "

On Moskowitz's desk is a photograph of his father, a rabbi whose male ancestors, going back eight generations, were also rabbis. He is in the know about technology (he built his home computer), sports (he follows the Yankees), and politics (he reads *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *Times*, and several Israeli newspapers, all online). Whereas Grunberg told me that he'd never heard of Woody Allen ("Is he Jewish?" he asked), Moskowitz could fill you in on the characters and plotlines of "Finding Nemo" and "Ratatouille."

Moskowitz went to high school in Israel, and has lived there ever since. At twenty, he got married and became a *mashgiah*. After working for many years for an Israeli company, examining canned mushrooms in China, Moskowitz created Shatz Kosher Services. He charges three thousand dollars for a year's worth of inspections. "The other agencies say I'm undermining the price," he said. "But, because we are small, we can keep our expenses down."

Moskowitz glanced at his BlackBerry. He and his wife, in Israel, send each other text messages constantly. "My wife's my biggest fan," he said. "The great woman behind the man." Every few months, Moskowitz takes his wife on a vacation. Recently, they went to Disney World. Their nine children stayed home.

The next day, Rabbi Moskowitz and I set off for Linyi Zhonghai Foodstuff Company, a canned-fruit manufacturer in Yixing village, a destination that took us almost six hours to reach. We travelled in a rickety old taxi that the Rabbi's assistant hailed on the street after the car service he'd booked cancelled at the last minute.

I asked Moskowitz if he had a theory about why Jews like Chinese food so much, but he, like Grunberg, said that he had never noticed such an affinity. "Are there foods that Jews don't like?" he asked in reply. He said that it was his dream to one day open a company that sells kosher food to airlines.

Rabbi Moskowitz and I didn't pull up to the factory until after five, which gave us little time for schmoozing with the manager if I was to make my flight back to Shanghai. The company translator led us immediately to the manager's office—a roomy dominion that could have belonged to an American C.E.O. of the nineteen-fifties. On the glass coffee table was a porcelain tea service and a spread of precisely arranged bowls of tofu balls, little plates of crispy nuts, and maroon things whose identity would remain unknown to me. The manager sat opposite us, looking earnest in his short-sleeved white shirt as he poured green tea into tiny cups. "Don't drink too fast or he'll refill," Rabbi Moskowitz whispered to me.

"My boss wants to know what product you are interested in?" the translator said, looking at me. "She's from New York City," Rabbi Moskowitz said quickly. The translator relayed the information to the boss, who then smiled and said something. "My boss says 'Broadway,'" the translator said. We all laughed. "My boss wants to know if you like fruit cocktail," the translator said. The boss seemed pleased by the report that I did like fruit cocktail. "So we can see the factory now?" I said, looking at my watch. "After tea," the translator said sternly. *Oy vey.*

Pleasantries completed, dressed in paper vestments, we sloshed through the few inches of water on the floor of the washing and sorting area, and established with dispatch that the strawberries on the assembly line seemed to be free of insects. Later, in an alcove no roomier than a walk-in closet, the translator showed us a display of canned goods lined up neatly on a metal shelf. "And here," he said, "is the fruit cocktail," gesturing toward a can with a flourish. Everyone looked at me expectantly. "Very nice," I said.

"Tell your boss that she is pleased with the factory," Moskowitz said to the translator.

"Our boss would like you to stay for supper," the translator said. "I can't eat—you know that," Moskowitz replied. "And she has a flight. Tell your boss the factory's very good." Eventually, our entourage assembled for a group photo in the parking lot.

"My boss hopes that in the future we can work together," the translator said to me.

"That would be very nice," I said. We all laughed.

Rabbi Moskowitz and I made our getaway.

"What was the boss's name?" I asked Moskowitz, once we were safely in the car. "I don't remember," Moskowitz said. "But I'm sure it wasn't Yankel." ♦

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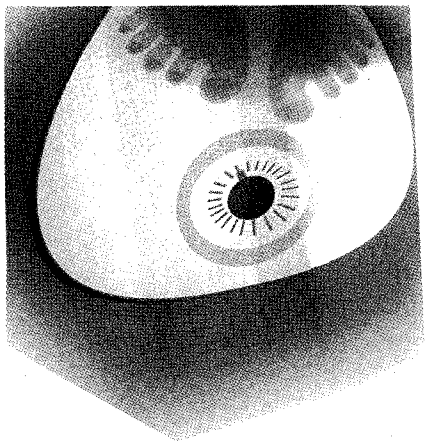
SHOUTS & MURMURS

LOOKING YOUR BEST

BY AMY OZOLS

People say that obesity is an epidemic in America, but I'm determined not to become part of the problem. That's why I've spent years perfecting the secret to a trim and attractive physique. My foolproof system involves just nine easy steps.

Step 1: Avoid what psychologists refer to as "emotional eating." This is hard, because many people have a tendency to experience emotions. To solve this problem, consume increasing dosages of psychotropic medications until you cease to feel emotions of any kind.



LAURIE ROSENWALD

Step 2: Visualize yourself as a thin person. This is very important, because the body often takes its signals from the brain. Each time you take a bite of food, imagine that you are a thin person taking a bite of food, chewing the food, then spitting the food into a napkin, then tucking the napkin into your backpack or purse. After you're done visualizing these things, start doing them.

Step 3: Get rid of your "fat clothes." Keeping your closet stocked with unflattering garments will only distract you from your quest for a slender body. To complete this step, shred or burn everything in your closet, including any hangers or shelving that a fat person may have touched. Refrain from donating anything to charity, as this could cause underprivileged people to become obese, which would be unsavory and possibly even illegal.

Step 4: Refrain from consuming food.

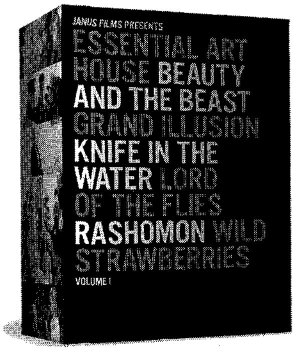
Step 5: Surround yourself with thin people. This will naturally encourage you to emulate their healthy habits. Weigh your friends on a regular basis, then weigh yourself. Do you have a friend who weighs less than you? If so, consider gastric bypass surgery.

Step 6: Drink plenty of water. As you've probably heard, water functions as a natural lubricant in the body, flushing toxins and fat cells from the digestive tract. Water is also a delicious replacement for higher-fat liquids, such as milk. Try pouring water on your cereal or in your coffee. If you're a baby, try pouring water into your mother's breasts.

Step 7: Buy a pet. Having a pet will force you to take walks, which are a form of exercise. This is true unless you make the mistake that I made, which was buying an iguana. Iguanas walk very slowly and smell strongly of turds. I really cannot dissuade you strongly enough from buying an iguana.

Step 8: Vigorous sexual intercourse burns up to two hundred calories per hour. Therefore, if you are not currently promiscuous, it is essential that you begin "boning" immediately. Start by having sex with every person you know. Then have sex with numerous people you have never met. Continue doing this until you are thin.

Step 9: Self-confidence is the most attractive trait a person can have. For this reason, strive to love yourself and accept yourself exactly as you are. This will be difficult if you are overweight, on account of your loathsome physical appearance and compromised value system, but do your best. And, if the going gets tough, remind yourself: every person is beautiful on the inside, provided that they are also extremely attractive on the outside. ♦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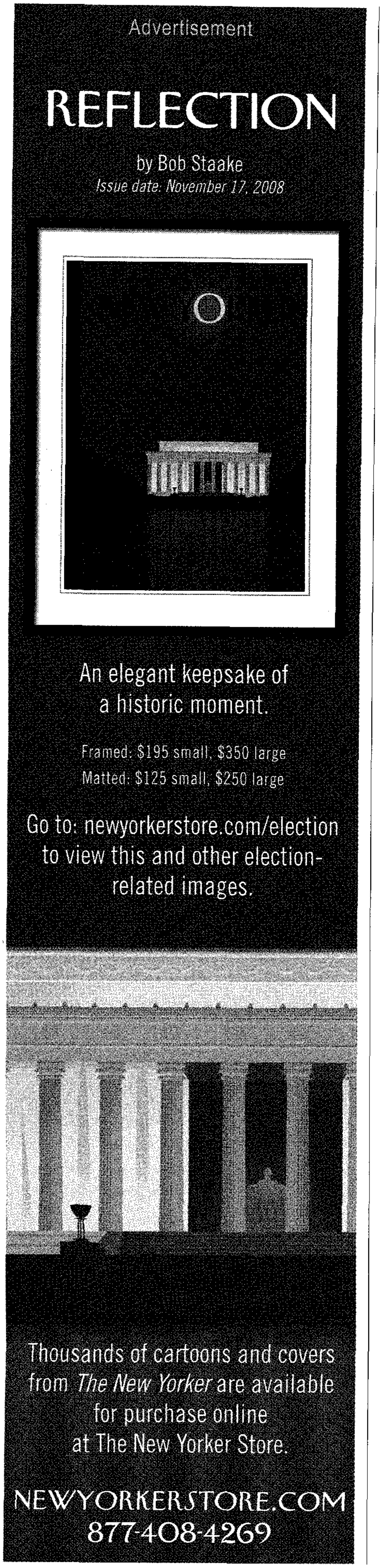

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE PRETENDER

Will Oldham transfigures American music.

BY KELEFA SANNEH

"I'm trying to run a tight ship," Will Oldham said when he came to the door. By which he meant "Don't be late again." It was a Friday afternoon in Louisville, Kentucky, and Oldham was in his working house, a cozy place that would be perfect for a small family, were it not for all the musical instruments and studio equipment. It's tucked behind some trees on a dense residential street in the Highlands, an area known for its charming shops and rising property values. (He also has a sleeping house nearby, which is just about empty.) Oldham tends to hide his thoughts behind a faint, ambiguous smile, and hides his smile behind an unpruned beard, which can make him seem like a man out of time. This impression is underscored by his excellent posture—though that may merely be evidence of a childhood spent in the theatre, learning to be conscious of his body and how it moves. The front hall was full of CDs, books, and boxes of T-shirts, and Oldham was holding a small stack of light-blue envelopes, the same shade as the cover of his most recent album. On the front of one, he had written, "Mom . . . plus siblings." There were concert tickets inside, and they had to be delivered soon, because the concert was twenty-four hours away. It was time to go.

He walked across the street to his car, a well-worn minivan. A bumper sticker said, "When you have overpowered an enemy, show him forgiveness out of gratitude for the ability to overpower him." (The quote comes from Ali ibn Abu Talib, the central figure in Shia Islam; Oldham got hooked on Muslim bumper stickers after seeing some in a shop in Chicago.) Louisville is his home town: lots of people there know him, and lots more people know who he is. Oldham must be one of the country's most celebrated singer-songwriters, and if it's a relatively small number of people doing the celebrating—well, that just shows how hard they've been working. He hadn't driven more than a few blocks before a man waved him over and asked if he had a spare ticket for the concert. He did.

Oldham has been releasing records for fifteen years, though almost never under his own name. His first recordings were credited to Palace Brothers, a name inspired by John Steinbeck's "Cannery Row"—in which the characters' makeshift home is known as the Palace Flophouse—and by close-harmony duos such as the Louvin Brothers, who helped expand the scope of early country music, and the Everly Brothers, whose hits from half a century ago underscored the link between country music and early rock and roll. Oldham was a student of music history, clearly, but he never sounded studious. He had an eerie, strangulated voice, half wild and half broken. And he sang vivid and peculiar songs, which sometimes sounded like old standards rewritten as fever dreams or, occasionally, as inscrutable dirty jokes.

These days, he calls himself Bonnie "Prince" Billy, and his music is a little bit easier to love and a lot harder to dismiss. He has settled into character as an uncanny troubadour, singing a sort of transfigured country music, and he has become, in his own subterranean way, a canonical figure. Johnny Cash covered him, Björk has championed him (she invited him to appear on the soundtrack of "Drawing Restraint 9"), and Madonna, he suspects, has quoted him (her song "Let It Will Be" seems to borrow from his "O Let It Be," though he says, "I'm fully prepared to accept that it's a coincidence"). One tribute came from the indie folksinger Jeffrey Lewis, whose song "Williamsburg Will Oldham Horror" affectionately portrays Oldham as both a hero and a brute; the joke is that most indie-rock listeners already think of him that way. And a recent, unenthusiastic review in the London *Independent* nonetheless concluded that Oldham was "the underground artist most likely to work his way into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame." Although he has never signed with a major label, and has never risen higher than No. 194 on *Billboard's* album chart, his concerts sell out all over the world. If he remains a spectral figure, that is no coincidence. In an online tour diary from a few years ago, he wrote, "It is more rewarding to be complicit with scarcity than excess."

He is known, too, as a recluse and an enigma—two words that journalists often use to describe people who don't particularly enjoy talking to journalists. He is cagey in interviews; he hates photo shoots. But he rarely goes more than a few months without some kind of record release. And in the past few years he has swum closer to the surface. He has rerecorded some of his best-loved songs with deft Nashville professionals, prettifying—or, if you like, desecrating—his own beloved back catalogue of obscurities. He has starred in a Kanye West video, alongside the comedian Zach Galifianakis. He appeared in the independent films "Junebug," "Old Joy," and "Wendy and Lucy," the new Michelle Williams film (he also wrote a melody for her to hum in it). And he played a police officer in "Trapped in the Closet," the multipart comic opera by the R. & B. singer R. Kelly, who is one of Oldham's favorites. It's a small part, but he looks as if he's having fun.

Oldham has become an uncanny troubadour and, in his own subterranean way, a canonical figure. Photograph by Steve Gullick.

Oldham's mother, Joanne, was still living in the home where he grew up, a two-story house on a hill at the end of a leafy cul-de-sac. After delivering most of his envelopes, he went to see her, stopping at a liquor store on the way to buy some tonic water. Joanne is a soft-spoken but lively woman who seems nearly unshockable. She is an artist; she drew the image on the cover of her son's most recent album, "Lie Down in the Light"—the one with the light-blue cover. (Her assignment: re-create "The Wrestlers," by Gustave Courbet, but turn it into an image of Jacob wrestling the angel.) In the spirit of hospitality, she offered a warning: she said that her son wasn't always easy to interview. The word she used was "ornery."

"Ornery" also happens to be the title of a profile of the country-music singer Merle Haggard that was published in this magazine, in 1990. To Oldham, Haggard, like R. Kelly, is a living hero. (In this trinity the third member is Leonard Cohen.) He says that fond memories of that story, which was written by Bryan Di Salvatore, persuaded him to coöperate for this story, although not without trepidation. In Di Salvatore's piece, Haggard is discovered in the kitchen of his tour bus, with his feet stretched out under a table, "naked except for a plaid flannel shirt and après-ski boots." Oldham says, "That's, like, an ideal for me. That's such a great life."

Oldham served drinks and talked about a recent European tour, during which he smuggled psychedelic mushrooms across a border (he hid them in his underwear) and stole a hairpin from a flamenco singer (he hid it in his beard). Soon, it was time for dinner, and after some back-and-forth Oldham and his mother decided on an upscale pub nearby. Oldham started up the minivan, which is equipped with a fearsome-looking sound system. To demonstrate its capabilities, he cranked up an old cabaret song.

"It's Mabel Mercer, so it's not really a test of the system," he said.

"I remember Mabel Mercer," Joanne said. "*God.*"

The concert hadn't been Oldham's idea; it had come from his friend Oscar Parsons, a singer and guitarist from western Virginia (on his MySpace page, he calls himself a "skinny ass billhilly"), who first befriended Oldham by offering him some homemade blueberry moonshine. Parsons wanted to know how much Oldham charged for a concert. Oldham said, "Fuck, anywhere from zero to twenty-five thousand dollars. It depends who asks." They rented a P.A. system, and agreed that Oscar's group—Thomas A. Minor and the Picket Line, with Oscar in the role of Thomas—would be the opening act and also Oldham's backing band. They asked Oscar's sister Jennifer, who lives in Los Angeles, to print the tickets on a letterpress. She made three hundred, and they quickly disappeared from Louisville shops, at ten dollars apiece.

By way of rehearsal, Oldham and the band had spent the week giving brief, unannounced performances at local bars. On Thursday night, he had called up Joe's Palm Room, a venerable and predominantly African-American establishment, and asked, "Do y'all have music tonight?"

The answer was no.

"Do you want some?"

No.

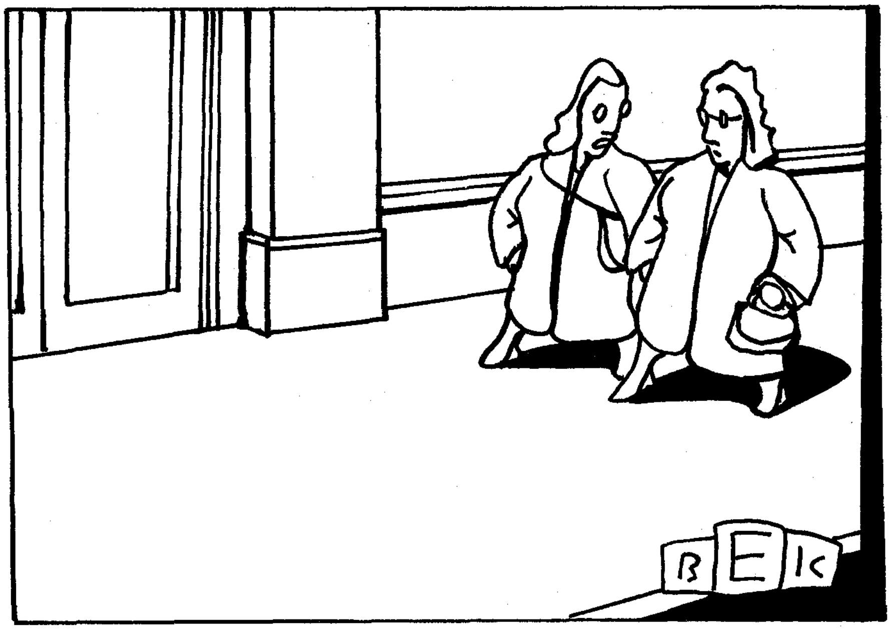
"So if we came down there with some instruments and played some music, would you like that?"

No.

"For free?"

Eventually, the staff had consented to let Oldham and his band play, or, at any rate, consented not to stop them from playing. A few fans managed to track him down, but many of the people in the audience had no idea that they were watching one of Louisville's most celebrated residents, and Oldham seemed proud to have won over a few skeptics. His favorite review came from a regular patron who had been moved to shout, "Sing that shit!"

Will Oldham was born in 1970, the second of three boys; Joanne was a full-time mother, and his father, Joe, who died in 2006, was a lawyer and an amateur photographer. By the early nineteen-eighties, Oldham was getting musical tips from his older brother, Ned, who was immersed in Louisville's fertile punk-rock scene, and he soon developed his own adventurous listening habits—he struck up a correspondence with the noisemaker and poet Lydia Lunch, after meeting her at a Sonic Youth show during a trip to New York. (He also remembers sending a "fairly elaborate" package, including a collage, to Glenn Danzig, the former leader of the horror-punk band the Misfits; he says that Danzig, in turn, sent him a package that included a rare copy of "Cough/Cool," the band's 1977 début single.) Despite his strong and particular musical tastes, Oldham was taken with acting—or, more accurately, he was taken with the idea of getting into character. He studied at the Walden Theatre, appeared onstage at Louisville's acclaimed Actors Theatre, and auditioned for a role in "Matewan," John Sayles's film about a coal strike in the nineteen-twenties. He got the part of Danny, a prophetic boy preacher, which meant two months away from high school, living with actors (including Chris Cooper and James Earl Jones), the crew, and a tutor in West Virginia, and earning twelve hundred and fifty dollars a week, plus a per diem. When he got back to Louisville, he couldn't figure out what to do next; with some nudging from his parents, he finished high school and applied to Brown. He lasted one semester before dropping out; he moved to Los Angeles, then to New York, tried Brown again, and finally left for good.



"Having nannies really changes you."

All the while, he remained loosely connected to Louisville's music scene. While he was shooting "Matewan," some of his best friends formed a band called Slint; Oldham shot the cover photograph for Slint's 1991 album, "Spiderland," which was recognized, belatedly, as an indie-rock classic. But he never felt the itch to start his own band. "Singing seemed more real to me than acting—and therefore didn't seem very interesting," he says. He had an agent, for a time, and landed a few more roles (he played the father in "Everybody's Baby," a TV movie about Jessica McClure, the baby who fell down a well), but he came to realize that acting wasn't very interesting to him, either: an awful lot of it appeared to consist of fussing over lights and line readings.

He was unmoored and, sometimes, mentally fragile. "I retreated into a purely imaginary world," he says now, remembering the time he attempted to stop speaking, in the hope of discovering a more intuitive means of communication and a more sympathetic community. He eventually found both through music, though he started writing songs only because people around him told him to. He learned his first few guitar chords about the time he went to Brown, and began experimenting with words and melodies at the insistence of Ned and the guys from Slint. He remembers a slow-breaking revelation: "I thought, O.K., music can be a construction, like a movie or like a book. It's not a person singing about their life—someone has actually learned a craft." He made some recordings, including "Ohio River Boat Song," which has become one of his signatures. (It's a Kentuckified version of a Scottish folk standard, "Loch Tay Boat Song"; instead of singing "I look towards Ben Lawers," in reference to a Scottish mountain, he sings, "I look towards Floyds Knobs," in reference to some hills in southern Indiana, across the river from Louisville.) Because he didn't have a better plan, he sent out four packages: to the New York indie-rock labels Matador and Homestead (no reply); the Los Angeles upstart Interscope (a polite no); and Drag City, a quirky young label based in Chicago.

Dan Koretzky, a co-founder of Drag City, agreed to release a two-song single and then Oldham's 1993 début album, "There Is No-One What Will Take Care of You." Except for a few years during which he tried putting out his own albums, Oldham has worked with Drag City ever since. The album, which included a version of a song by the mysterious nineteen-twenties gospel singer Washington Phillips, got Oldham some attention, and some gigs. (He and his bandmates were offered a thousand dollars a show to be an opening act on the 1994 Lollapalooza tour; they signed up, and, he says, saw their fee raised by two hundred and fifty dollars after the death of Kurt Cobain, whose band, Nirvana, had been scheduled as the headliner.) The songs were slow, as if Oldham's Kentucky warble were pulling the recalcitrant instruments along, and the lyrics, which were full of references to death and sin, helped encourage all sorts of fantasies about Oldham. One reviewer wondered if the album had been recorded in a barn. Oldham says that he had set out to make a swaggering blockbuster, in the tradition of the Rolling Stones' "Sticky Fingers." (Suffice it to say that what he made was closer in spirit to "Moonlight Mile," that album's ruminative finale, than to its first song, "Brown Sugar.") He claims to have been baffled by the response. "When people were saying, 'This sounds Southern,' 'This sounds country,' 'This sounds Appalachian,' I was just, like, 'What the fuck? We made a rock record!' "

The idea that he is some sort of folk-art naïf, or an Ivy League dropout pretending to be some sort of folk-art naïf, long haunted and irritated him. And he spent much of the nineteen-nineties embracing and rejecting various pretenses. Oldham's second album, "Days in the Wake," from 1994, is a simple recording of him singing and strumming; "Viva Last Blues," which he made with a full band and released in 1995, includes a half-heroic rock song called "Work Hard/Play Hard." With each album, he tweaked his name: Palace Brothers became Palace, then Palace Songs, and finally Palace Music. "Arise Therefore," a dark and tangled album from 1996, was released with no artist's name at all, and "Joya," which he made twice (he thought the original version sounded "unfocussed"), was simply credited to Will Oldham.

The idea, all along, was to erase the person making the music so that listeners would focus on the music itself. Of course, it didn't work that way: with each new release came a barrage of questions about Oldham's new name, and the evasions only added to his mystique. And so, one day in 1998, flying back from a tour of Australia, he created Bonnie "Prince" Billy, inspired equally by Bonnie Prince Charlie, the eighteenth-century pretender to the English throne, and Nat King Cole. "He's going to sing songs that have verses, choruses, and bridges," Oldham decided. "He's, like, a Brill Building or Nashville songwriter." Oldham had finally found a role that he loved. A casual listener might not have noticed the difference, but it's not clear that Oldham has any casual listeners.

Oldham's fans tend to be nearly as obsessed with his music as he is (a number of fan Web sites attempt to track his output, which now includes more than a hundred albums, singles, and collaborations), but he still likes the idea of being an old-fashioned artiste, humbly amusing the general public. And this new character was proof of his commitment. He says, "Bonnie 'Prince' Billy can be more entertaining, ideally, than Palace Brothers were or Will Oldham was." True to form, he signalled the start of this "entertaining" era with a bleak, subdued album called "I See a Darkness," which had a skull on the cover. The album, which appeared in 1999, wasn't necessarily more fun than Oldham's previous ones but it was more direct. The title song has become one of his most popular; Johnny Cash sang it, on "American III: Solitary Man," an album from 2000 produced by Rick Rubin, who has long been an Oldham fan. It's a solemn song, but the homely lyrics tug against the prophetic tone of the title: "Well, I hope that someday, buddy, we have peace in our lives/Together or apart, alone or with our wives." Part of the thrill was the feeling—however illusory—that, for once, you knew exactly what Oldham was talking about.

Tickets for the concert carried a stern warning—"No Beer, Alcohol or Drugs"—and some legalese, which, it turned out, was adapted from Ticketmaster ("This ticket is a revocable license and may be taken up and admission refused for any reason"). No address was given, in order to discourage gate-crashers; ticket holders had to e-mail for directions, which led them to a small field in the southeastern exurbs of Louisville, past a "Do Not Enter" sign, and down a gravel road. The concert site was a clearing on a lake; the land belonged to the family of Brad Reinstedler, a banjo player in Oscar Parsons's band, whose friends had named the field Funtown and elected him mayor. Weeks before the concert, on a Louisville music blog called Backseat Sandbar, one fan spread word of the lake and advised concertgoers to bring bathing suits. Reinstedler replied, "There will be no swimming due to some unfortunate circumstances." He had purchased liability insurance for the concert, but not enough to insure swimmers.

Cars began arriving at around five in the afternoon; they were met by volunteers who checked for tickets and directed parking. One of them explained how he planned to enforce the no-alcohol policy: "If they got more beers than what I think they can handle, then I'm gon' take a few of 'em." This plan proved unnecessary: alcohol consumption was moderate, although some visitors talked reverently about a "waterfall" in the woods, which turned out to be a beer keg next to someone's car. Gate-crashers were scarce. Oldham is, in his soft-spoken way, an intimidating presence, and it appeared that no one wanted to get on his bad side. "You print the rules and cross your fingers," he said.

Even he had to admit that this was as pleasant a concert setting as could be imagined. The stage was a flatbed trailer set up in front of a log cabin; it was a breezy summer afternoon, and people brought folding chairs and beach blankets. His mother was there, with a collection of aunts and uncles. Parsons, shirtless in swimming trunks and as skinny as advertised, sang some charming, shambling mountain songs with his band, and then there was a fake marriage ceremony, in case the neighbors were watching—they had been told that the gathering was for a wedding, on the theory that this would make them less likely to call the police. Then Oldham took the stage, with Parsons and the band surrounding him. He was wearing a maroon tank top, orange-and-pink pants, blue Crocs, and a pink Boston Red Sox cap, with "cam" and "odia" scrawled on either side of the "B."

Parsons began strumming, and Oldham leaned in to test the microphone. "Y-y-yeah," he said. Then he clasped his hands behind his back and started singing "Easy Does It," the first song from "Lie Down in the Light." His singing has grown more precise over the years, and he sometimes closes one eye, pirate-like, or shakes his head, as if he were fighting to push his voice closer to the notes that he hears in his mind. Volunteers had distributed commemorative Bonnie "Prince" Billy kazoos to the first hundred or so people who showed up, and before a song called "Goat and Ram" (which begins by expounding upon the central creed of Islam: "There is no God but God/God in your body, which is mine") he asked audience members to get out their kazoos and toot along, creating an E drone. Someone asked why there weren't enough kazoos to go around. "We've actually got a complaint box up here," he said, motioning toward his crotch. "It's right here." He thought for a moment. "But it's already full."

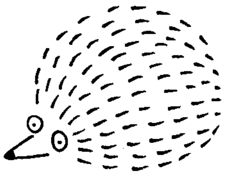
There was one unexpected cover: a version of "Little Boxes," the sixties folk hit that served as the theme song of the Showtime series "Weeds," one of Parsons's favorites. And Oldham found ways to transform some of his own earlier songs: "Death to Everyone," a dirge, became a high-spirited sing-along. During "A King at Night," he smiled at band members who flubbed the occasional note, and some of the people on blankets joined him in the refrain: "This is how I start another day in my kingdom." Bent forward, with one knee up, he looked a bit like a court jester. The sun was setting, so the Christmas lights that had been hung above the stage seemed to grow brighter with every song. He was accompanied all night by the thrum of cicadas, and the music was punctuated by an occasional splash from the lake.

Oldham has been singing a lot of duets recently, using the conventions of male-female singing—calls and responses, low declarations and high harmonies—to mimic the stylized love he sings about, which sounds more traditional than confessional. The clear-voiced singer Marty Slayton, who sometimes sings backup for George Strait, helped him nudge his old songs a little way toward the country mainstream on "Bonnie 'Prince' Billy Sings Greatest Palace Music," in 2004; the first time he heard her voice over his it was "almost an erotic experience," he says. "The Letting Go," from 2006, was dominated by the unexpected countermelodies of Dawn McCarthy, who leads her own group, Faun Fables, which is now signed to Drag City. (He got to know her by taking her on tour, along with a then unheralded singer and harpist named Joanna Newsom.) For his latest album, he found an unlikely duet partner in Ashley Webber, a relatively unknown Canadian singer whom he met on tour. Onstage, Cheyenne Mize, a dexterous fiddler, filled in for Webber. When he called out "O lady," she called back "O boy!"

This most recent album, "Lie Down in the Light," sounds generous, like an invitation. "It's O.K. to accept good fortune," Oldham says, by way of explaining the title. But the song of the same name, which he performed at Funtown, could just as easily describe the apocalypse:

> When the sun welcomes us in
> And the earth's protective skin
> Fails and peels back, face to chin
> Then we start it all again
>
> Why do you frown?
> Why do you try?
> Why don't you lie down in the light?

Oldham's voice goes up on those last three words, as if he really wanted to know. And, near the end of the song, Parsons, still shirtless, broke the eerie mood with a Jew's-harp solo. Friends hooted their approval.



When the show was over, the crowd dispersed, helped along by an announcement that there was an after-party at a bar in town. (This was true, though perhaps misleading, since none of the performers had any plans to attend.) Parsons passed around some moonshine, and Oldham created a cocktail of his own by mashing some watermelon into a plastic cup of tequila. A young fan was sitting at his feet, rapt. She had come from California, and had brought him some marijuana-infused caramel—"weedamel," she called it.

It was time to go swimming. Oldham was one of the first people in the lake, and others wanted to know if it was cold. He looked thoughtful. This was not a simple question. "I found it cold, but there are others who are not finding it cold," he said. "My body temperature dropped right before I went in—the world became cold." He conjectured that maybe the water felt cold to him only because he was anticipating the cold feeling of getting out of it. He got out and dried off. The group headed back to the cabin. People pawed through a table full of empty potato-chip bags, looking for a bottle that had something in it. It was past three, and some of the revellers were talking about lighting a bonfire. More people left. Some tents appeared in the field. Oldham retreated to his minivan, and by dawn he was gone.

He looked none the worse for wear the next afternoon, sitting in his kitchen. Remembering his disappearance the previous night, Oldham said, "I figured I should sleep for, like, an hour and a half. For legal reasons." He had agreed to talk about music, and so he did, although the idea makes him uneasy, not least because he knows the pitfalls. In the pre-Internet era, a generation of young bands internalized the financial priorities of the used-record stores that they relied on; it was as if they envied those valuable used records, ancient enough and obscure enough to be rediscovered—and priced accordingly. Long before 1997, when the Smithsonian reissued Harry Smith's 1952 "Anthology of American Folk Music," Oldham was fascinated by what Greil Marcus once called the "old, weird America." But he also knows that, for many singers, a fixation on the antique and the quirky has been a handicap. "Old" is merely a word for something that was once new and survived; no amount of affectation will provide a shortcut. And "weird," misapplied, can be even worse. Surely, Washington Phillips, with his modified zither (if that's what it was) and his gutbucket sermons, never set out to be weird. And if Phillips nevertheless was weird—well, weird to whom?

Oldham has been careful to avoid getting sentimental about days gone by, and he goes out of his way to remind listeners that he doesn't want to be heard as an alternative to the new, seemingly normal America. His repertoire of cover songs includes "Just to See You Smile," which was a hit for Tim McGraw, and Mariah Carey's defiant ballad "Can't Take That Away (Mariah's Theme)." At first, these could have been interpreted as inclusive and faintly condescending gestures, as if he were welcoming a few vulgar favorites into his rarefied world. But by now Oldham's abiding interest in truly popular song is more appealing: an expression of impudence and aspiration. Why shouldn't his sturdy but cryptic odes find their place among the blockbusters?

In discussions with Drag City, Oldham sometimes referred to "Lie Down in the Light" as "LIDL," or "the little record," partly because he knew that he wouldn't be doing much to promote it. In March, he plans to release "the big record," a deeply satisfying album called "Beware," which conjures a mood of resolution, maybe even finality. (In the stately country song "I Don't Belong to Anyone," he amplifies the title of his 1993 début album: "I don't belong to anyone, there's no one who'll take care of me/It's kind of easy to have some fun when you don't belong to anyone.") He intends to promote the album with singles, a photo shoot, and a handful of interviews, if only to prove that record promotion doesn't really work, at least not for him.

He is inspired, and challenged, by the example of Merle Haggard. "He's writing and singing better than he ever has," Oldham says. "And it's just like, well, there's no excuse, then. You can't just say that it goes away, or that the music industry kills it, or whatever." He also likes the idea of stopping, content in the knowledge that he has done what he came to do. But he knows that he has contemplated quitting before. "Sometimes," he says, "we need to tell ourselves that we're not going to do certain things, just in order to stay sane."

As night fell, the conversation turned to the indie-rock industry that supports Oldham, and the indie-rock community that he keeps at arm's length. These days, it is, to a large extent, a world sustained by bars (where the musicians circulate) and the Internet (where the music circulates), both of which Oldham dislikes. He's always looking for ways to widen his circle: he'd love to get in the studio with R. Kelly, or spend a week watching Haggard work. And he resists the idea that, with his endless flow of obscurities and his maniacal fan base, he is one of the most blog-friendly musicians in the country. He asked, "At that show last night, what do you think, eighty per cent of the people read blogs? Fifty? Thirty? Ten? Ninety?" There were certainly plenty of cameras, and, sure enough, on Monday morning the indie-rock Web site Pitchfork posted six photographs and a brief writeup.

He went out to the minivan to retrieve something: a book of his lyrics, hand-printed and bound by a woman in West Virginia. "There were supposed to be three hundred," he said. "But a couple of pages got fucked up, so I think there are about two hundred and seventy-five or so. And I've just given them away, because I don't know how to sell 'em—you know, I don't want them to end up on eBay." He proffered a copy, with an inscription inside: "K. GOOD LUCK. BPB." But it was clear that he wasn't feeling entirely optimistic about having agreed to a magazine profile. "My mother's a huge fan, and I really liked that Merle piece, but definitely there's already . . ." He trailed off. "I don't know. I really hate press. And it's . . . yeah." ♦

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FANTAGRAPHICS

A CRITIC AT LARGE

IT TOOK A VILLAGE

How the Voice changed journalism.

BY LOUIS MENAND

The first person known to have said, "The Village isn't what it used to be" was the writer Floyd Dell. That was in 1916. Dell was from Illinois, and he had lived in Greenwich Village for less than three years. The Village is that kind of place: almost everybody who lives there has come from somewhere else, but when a new person arrives they tell him, "Man, you should have been here last year." The Village is kept alive by immigrants who, immediately after they settle in, start worrying that the Village is disappearing. A community that insecure needs a newspaper.

The *Village Voice* was founded in 1955. It is one of the most successful enterprises in the history of American journalism. It began as a neighborhood paper serving an area about a tenth the size of the Left Bank, in Paris, and it became, within ten years, a nationally known brand and the inspiration for a dozen other local papers across the country. By 1967, it was the best-selling weekly newspaper in the United States, with a single-day circulation higher than the circulations of ninety-five per cent of American big-city dailies. It survived the deaths of four other New York City newspapers and most of its imitators, and it has had a longer life than the weekly *Life*. But, in books about the modern press, it is given a smaller role than it deserves.

Success may be part of the reason. The *Voice* was, from the start, a for-profit venture. For many years, it hung on by its teeth. Between 1955 and 1962, it lost nearly sixty thousand dollars; the combined salaries of its editor and its publisher, for that entire period, was eighteen thousand dollars. But, when it hit the black, it got very fat very quickly. In 1968, the paper ran 1.7 million lines of display ads and four hundred and sixty thousand lines of classifieds—twelve hundred individual advertisements every week. The typical issue was eighty pages; two-thirds of the book was advertising.

Advertising may seem to fall into the same category as richness, thinness, and approval, one of the things you can never have too much of. But a paper that is more than two-thirds advertising starts to look like what is known in the industry as a "shopper"—a free publication that people pick up for the ads, and that no one really reads, a paper that has editorial content mainly for the purpose of self-respect. The quality of the *Voice's* editorial content has varied, but it was never just a shopper. Still, its prosperity may have obscured its originality. The *Voice* changed journalism, because it changed the idea of what it was to be a journalist.

The *Voice* was not the first local paper in Greenwich Village. The *Villager*, which had been founded in 1933, was distributed free to twenty-seven thousand readers. The *Villager* promoted itself as "Reflecting the Treasured Traditions of This Cherished Community"—which is a reminder that there has always been an upscale Village that has more in common with the Upper East Side than it does with Avenue A. But the voice of the *Villager* was a prewar voice, and the voice of the *Voice* was distinctly postwar. The cultural history of the Village is a Slinky on a staircase: it seems to flip over every three years or so. The *Voice* appeared around the time of the Beat writers, who were followed by the folkies, but the paper's sensibility took shape earlier, in the period right after the Second World War.

Intellectually and creatively, the center of the postwar Village was the New School. When the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944—the G.I. Bill—was passed, the New School's Adult Education Division added a B.A. program in order to take advantage of the act's education benefits, and enrollment more than tripled. The New School was also an attraction because of the presence of what Anatole Broyard, in his flavorful memoir of Village life in the nineteen-forties, "Kafka Was the Rage," called "the storm troopers of humanism." These were the European émigrés, refugees from totalitarianism and anti-Semitism, who taught in the Adult Education Division. These men and women had been witnesses to history; they carried its scars, and they wore its authority. Their students regarded them, and many of them regarded themselves, as bearing out of the burning wreck of Europe the ark of Western art and thought. One of the storm troopers was Jean Malaquais.

Malaquais was practically the incarnation of the twentieth-century dangling man. His real name was Wladimir Malacki, and he was born in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1908. His father, who was a classicist, and his mother, who was a musician, later died in the camps. He left Poland in 1926, travelled in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, worked as a laborer in France, and ended up in Paris, in 1935, where he changed his name (he took his new name from the Quai Malaquais) and began writing novels. André Gide admired Malaquais's first novel, "Les Javanais," a story based on his experiences as a miner in Provence, and he made Malaquais his private secretary. Malaquais fought for the Loyalists in Spain, where he was arrested as a Fascist provocateur by the Russians and nearly shot.

When the Second World War began, he was drafted into the French Army and captured by the Germans. He escaped (not difficult in the early months of the war; Sartre was a prisoner and escaped, too) and fled to Marseilles, where, with the help of the underground Emergency Rescue Committee, which also got Hannah Arendt, Marc Chagall, André Breton, and Marcel Duchamp out (all of them ended up in New York City), he managed to get to Venezuela, Mexico, and, finally, the United States. After the war, Malaquais returned briefly to Paris, where he published his most ambitious novel, "Planète sans Visa," about an international group of exiles in Vichy France. And it was there, in 1948, most likely at a party given by a man named Harold Kaplan, who was the Paris correspondent for *Partisan Review*, that Malaquais met Norman Mailer.

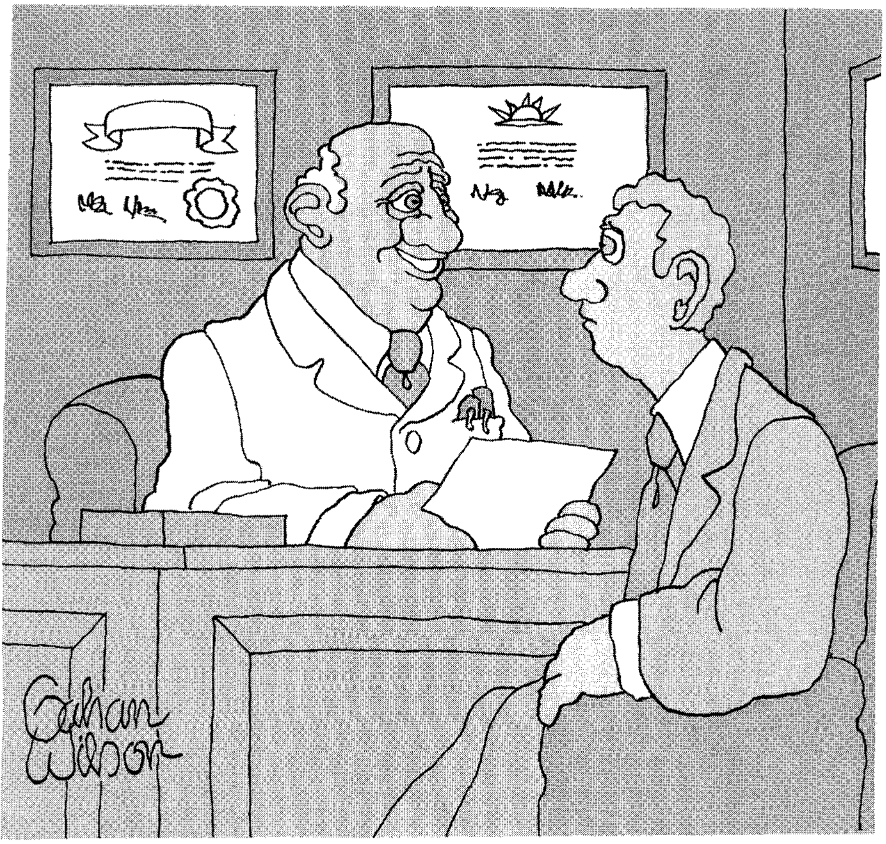
Mailer was twenty-five. He had just finished "The Naked and the Dead," and he was living in Paris with his wife, Bea, and taking a course at the Sorbonne called "Cours de la Civilisation Française"—a G.I. Bill special. Malaquais was forty. He was a Trotskyist, which signified, by then, mainly a superior and disillusioned leftism, a position from which anything, including anarchism, might follow. Malaquais naturally considered his grasp of conditions infinitely more hardheaded than Mailer's; he thought of Mailer, as he later put it, as

The Voice recruited new talent just by offering a place to publish, and it did not have to pay much. Illustration by Jules Feiffer.

“kind of a Boy Scout politically and intellectually.” “Even then,” he said, “he had this talent for expatiating about philosophers he didn't have the vaguest understanding of.” Accustomed to outmuscling more cautious friends and colleagues, Mailer seems to have enjoyed being outmuscled by Malaquais, and Malaquais became his guru, his boxing master, his Drew Bundini Brown—a relationship that was lifelong. At the end of 1948, Malaquais returned to New York and began teaching modern literature at the New School. And, soon after, at a party at his apartment in Brooklyn Heights, he introduced Mailer to one of his students, Dan Wolf.

Wolf was in his mid-thirties, and his career was without an obvious trajectory. He was born, in 1915, on the Upper West Side; his father was in the antique business. After finishing high school, he travelled in Europe, then served as a private in the Pacific theatre. He left the service in 1946, moved to the Village, and started attending the New School on the G.I. Bill. Wolf and Mailer liked each other and became good friends. Mailer's marriage was breaking up, and, one night in 1951, Wolf suggested that he might want to meet Adele Morales.

Wolf knew Morales because she had dated one of his New School friends, Edwin Fancher. Fancher was from Middletown, New York. He attended the University of Alaska, in Fairbanks, but did not graduate; served in Italy with the ski troops of the 10th Mountain Division during the war; and was working toward a degree in psychology at the New School. He had picked up Morales in the cafeteria. She was a painter; she had studied with the legendary Hans Hofmann, another refugee from the Nazis and one of the major influences on the Abstract Expressionism of the nineteen-forties, at his school on Eighth Street. She moved to Manhattan from Bensonhurst (her parents emigrated from Cuba) and she went out with Fancher for several years; she also had a brief relationship with Jack Kerouac, who was writing “On the Road.” (She is supposed to have been one of the first people to see the famous scroll.) She was sexually adventurous, and Mailer found her irresistible; in 1951, they combined two apartments upstairs from Wolf's, on First Avenue near Second Street, and began living together. The rent was sixteen dollars. Mailer came to the Village—after the huge success of “The Naked and the Dead,” sixty-two weeks on the *Times* best-seller list, he had moved to Vermont, of all places—because he was looking for the bohemians. Naturally, he was about a year too late.



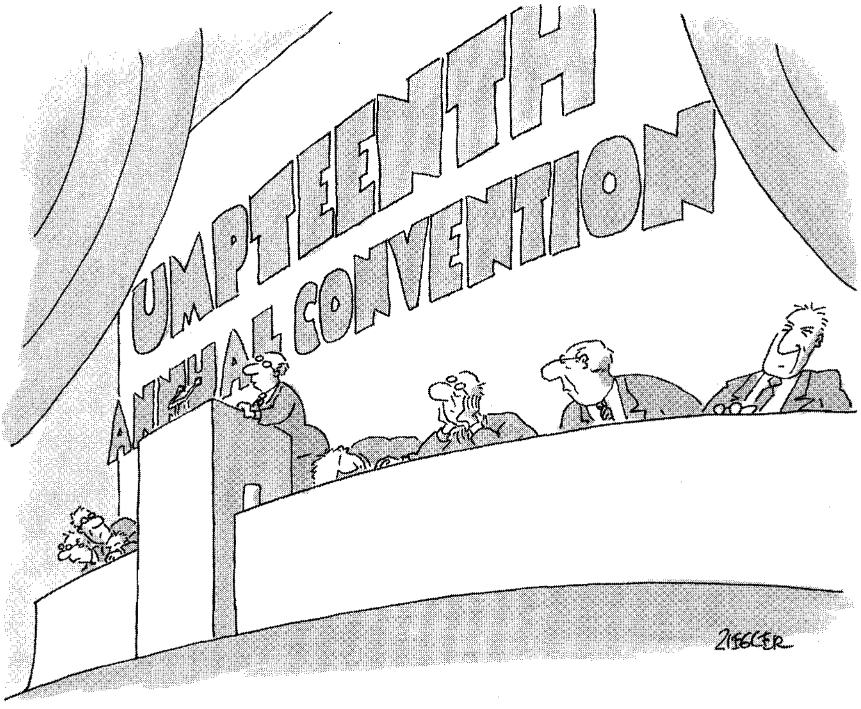
“Fortunately, treatment will be relatively inexpensive, since you have the generic form of the disease.”

“If it hadn't been for books,” Broyard says in his memoir, “we'd have been completely at the mercy of sex.” The Village stood for an advanced taste in literature and the arts; it also stood for sexual opportunity. (Exactly what the Village stood for in Floyd Dell's time, too.) The place where those two staples of human life intersected was the place where they have always intersected: the bar scene. In a tour of Hollywood, you visit the homes of the stars; in a tour of the Cold War Village, you visit the bars. (In a tour of the Village today, you visit places featured in “Sex and the City.”) There was the White Horse, on Hudson Street, where Dylan Thomas had the last of many drinks. There was the Cedar Tavern, on University, where the Abstract Expressionists drank and slugged each other. And there was the San Remo, on MacDougal. “The Remo was a sort of Village United Nations,” Michael Harrington, who came to the Village from St. Louis, in 1949, wrote. “The Remo was our Deux Magots, our Café Flore, our La Coupole.” The San Remo bar seems to have appealed to every type: John Cage and Miles Davis, James Agee and William Steig, Julian Beck and the editors of *Partisan Review*, whose office was on Astor Place.

Harrington's analogy was not casual: Village night life right after the war took inspiration from stories of Paris. The Left Bank was the liveliest venue in Europe after the Liberation—the home of *les caves existentialistes*, as Boris Vian described them in his amusing faux travel guide, “Manual of Saint-Germain-des-Prés,” written in 1949. Sartre and Beauvoir were its symbolic figures: close thinking and open marriages. Many of the people who were flooding into the neighborhood and taking classes at the New School were veterans, and they saw the Village, as Wolf later put it, “as an extension or a successor to Paris.” The Village promised the same combination of alcohol, sex, jazz, and highbrow conversation.

The Village also suffered the same victimization at the hands of what Vian called *les pisse-copie*—the hack journalists. The Village's *pisse-copie* was Mary McCarthy. In 1950, McCarthy needed money, and, through the good offices of her friend Arthur Schlesinger, she contracted to write a ten-part series for the New York *Post* on “Greenwich Village at Night.” McCarthy had lived in the Village in the nineteen-thirties, and she found, upon revisiting, that the place wasn't what it used to be. She felt comfortable in the San Remo, which she called “the Café de Flore of the Village,” but most of her reports were about (to use her terms) the fairies, the pansies, the rough trade, and the dikes. The Village of her pieces was a louche and depressing sexual playground. Nothing could scandalize McCarthy, of course: to promote the series, the *Post* reprinted her short story about casual train sex, “The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt.” But she expressed well the sensation of having been slumming, and her series performed the same function that “Sex and the City” did later on: it brought in the tourists. For the first time, as one Villager remembered, there was sexual graffiti in the men's room at the San Remo.

Mailer had other worries. His second novel, “Barbary Shore,” came out in 1951; it was dedicated to Malaquais. The reception was unkind, the start of a rough ride for Mailer. In 1954, he and Adele Morales were married; Mailer repaid Wolf for the successful matchmaking by introducing him to Rhoda Lazare, a social worker who was a close friend of Mailer's sister, Barbara, and Wolf and Lazare were married in 1955. That was the year that Mailer, Wolf, and Fancher founded the *Village Voice.*



Mailer liked to claim that he came up with the name for the paper, but, as Kevin McAuliffe suggests in his highly informative, highly enjoyable, and highly opinionated book about the *Voice*, “The Great American Newspaper” (1978), it seems likely that he simply picked it from a list of proposals made by potential readers. Fancher, who had started working as a psychologist, was the publisher. Wolf was the editor. And Mailer, invited in part because he was a source of capital, was officially a silent partner. None of these men had any experience in the newspaper business. “If we had known more, we certainly would have suffered less,” Wolf said later. But they did create a durable template.

The first issue of the *Voice* had an attractive white-on-black, black-on-white logo designed by a student of Hans Hofmann, Nell Blaine, who was an important figure in the postwar art world: she was associated with the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, which promoted the early poetry of John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara. But the logo was the closest the magazine got to serious graphic design. The layout was cut-and-paste: the eccentricity of the jumps in the *Voice*—page 1 to page 12, say, finishing with half an inch on page 3—became notorious. “I'd like to read you,” I. F. Stone told the columnist Nat Hentoff, “but I can't find you.” The stories were doggedly local: “VILLAGE TRUCKER SUES COLUMBIA: SEEKS $50,000” was the headline in the first issue. There were news stories about panels and classes at the New School; there was full coverage of the arts; there were columns on shopping and fashion. Beginning with the third issue, there was a letters section, whose tone of amused outrage did a lot to define the character of the paper and its readership. Harrington had a review of Budd Schulberg's novel “Waterfront” in the first issue, and he became a regular contributor, as did his wife, Stephanie Gervis, whose irreverent reporting—for example, a piece about picking up women in the Village, in 1962—set a standard in the nineteen-sixties.

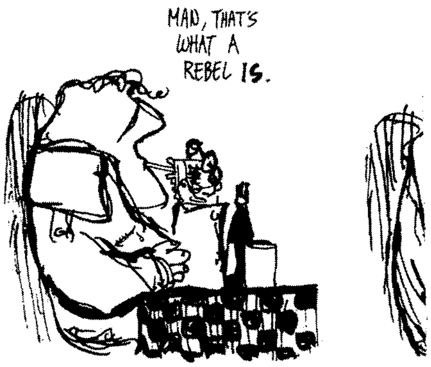
“The literary Zeitgeist, I guess you'd call it, or Weltanschauung, around the Remo and the New School was the intellectual heritage of the *Voice*,” Fancher once said. That Weltanschauung was humanist and individualist; it was anti-relativist and anti-utopian. It was even, in some respects, conservative: it was reflexively suspicious of calls for change—part of the intellectual heritage of anti-totalitarianism. What the *Voice* was not was therefore as important as what it was. It was not a left-wing paper; it distanced itself from the Old Left and, later on, from the New. The editors were disaffected with liberalism, but the goal was to avoid ideology altogether. “*The Nation, The New Republic,* and *Partisan* were all boring,” as Fancher later put it. “Ideology bored us—not simply the Communist line but the anti-Communist line too.” Eventually, the paper became associated with the Village Independent Democrats, the reform group that produced Ed Koch, and then with the mayoralty of John Lindsay. Koch and Lindsay were not men looking to overthrow the system.

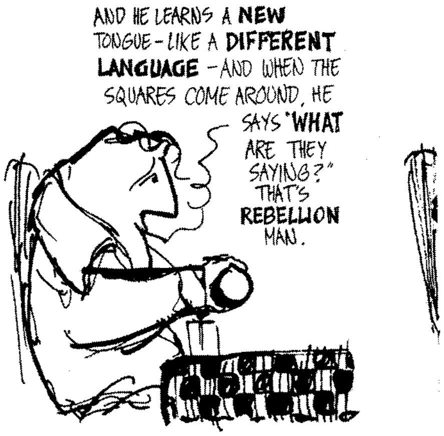
Nor was the *Voice* an underground or countercultural paper. The idea was to make money (at least, not to lose it), and though the business side of the operation was fairly hopeless—Mailer's dad, Barney, was the first accountant; at one point, every member of the sales department was a poet—the founders worked hard to distribute the paper to newsstands all over the city. They knew that they could not survive with the Village as their sole advertising base. The *Voice* reviewed high-end art, film, and theatre; its movie reviewer starting in 1958 was the arch-avant-gardist Jonas Mekas, a Lithuanian émigré who had spent four years in a camp for stateless persons after the war. Eventually, Andrew Sarris, a protégé of Mekas and a student of French film theory, took over. Beginning in 1956, the *Voice* ran a weekly comic strip by Jules Feiffer. But the paper was often skeptical of boldness. It gave a mixed review to Joseph Heller's "Catch-22," and, amazingly for a paper that was the great antagonist of Robert Moses, it ran a largely critical review of Jane Jacobs's "The Death and Life of Great American Cities." It regarded her as an enemy of urban planning, and a romantic about the lives and hopes of slumdwellers.

The *Voice* did run personals. The personal ad is a minor art form (personals are also a convenient way to generate content and income at the same time), and some of the *Voice's* were distinguished for their ingenuity: "Stubborn, penniless, aristocratic, unstable nitwit expects to hear from idiotic, irresponsible, temperamental broad who can't keep her mind on anything. If it's you, you might as well write back. I'll get hold of you sooner or later." But the *Voice* refused to run sex ads. (Later, there were debates among the editors about the propriety of accepting ads for massage parlors; McAuliffe says that Wolf and Fancher were relieved when Al Goldstein's *Screw* emerged, in 1968, to accommodate the sex-ad traffic.) And, before the nineteen-seventies, the *Voice* showed no interest in or concern with gay life and gay issues. When the Stonewall riots took place, one *Voice* reporter described them as "the forces of faggotry"; another found himself on the side of the police, fighting off the protesters. The *Voice* had no openly gay writers at the time; it had published only a few black writers. In 1969, gay activists picketed the paper after it rejected an ad for a gay dating service. The *Voice* was not on the cutting edge of anything except journalism. That, of course, is why it survived.

The *Voice's* editorial formula was the product of two people. One was Wolf. "Dan was a brilliant editor because he didn't edit," Feiffer's first wife, Judy, once said. Wolf recognized that New York City is filled with smart, ambitious people who will do anything to get their stuff in print. His strategy was to wait and see what came in. Stuff came in. So the paper was able to recruit new talent just by offering a place to publish, and it did not have to pay much. Sometimes, it didn't pay at all. This meant that Wolf had to be prepared to publish what writers wanted to write. So, on the one hand, the *Voice* was under-edited; but, on the other hand, it got material that no other publication did, because no other publication would have attracted it or known what to do with it. And, by all reports, Wolf had the kind of personality that inspired writers to give him their best. As McAuliffe puts it, he edited people, not copy.

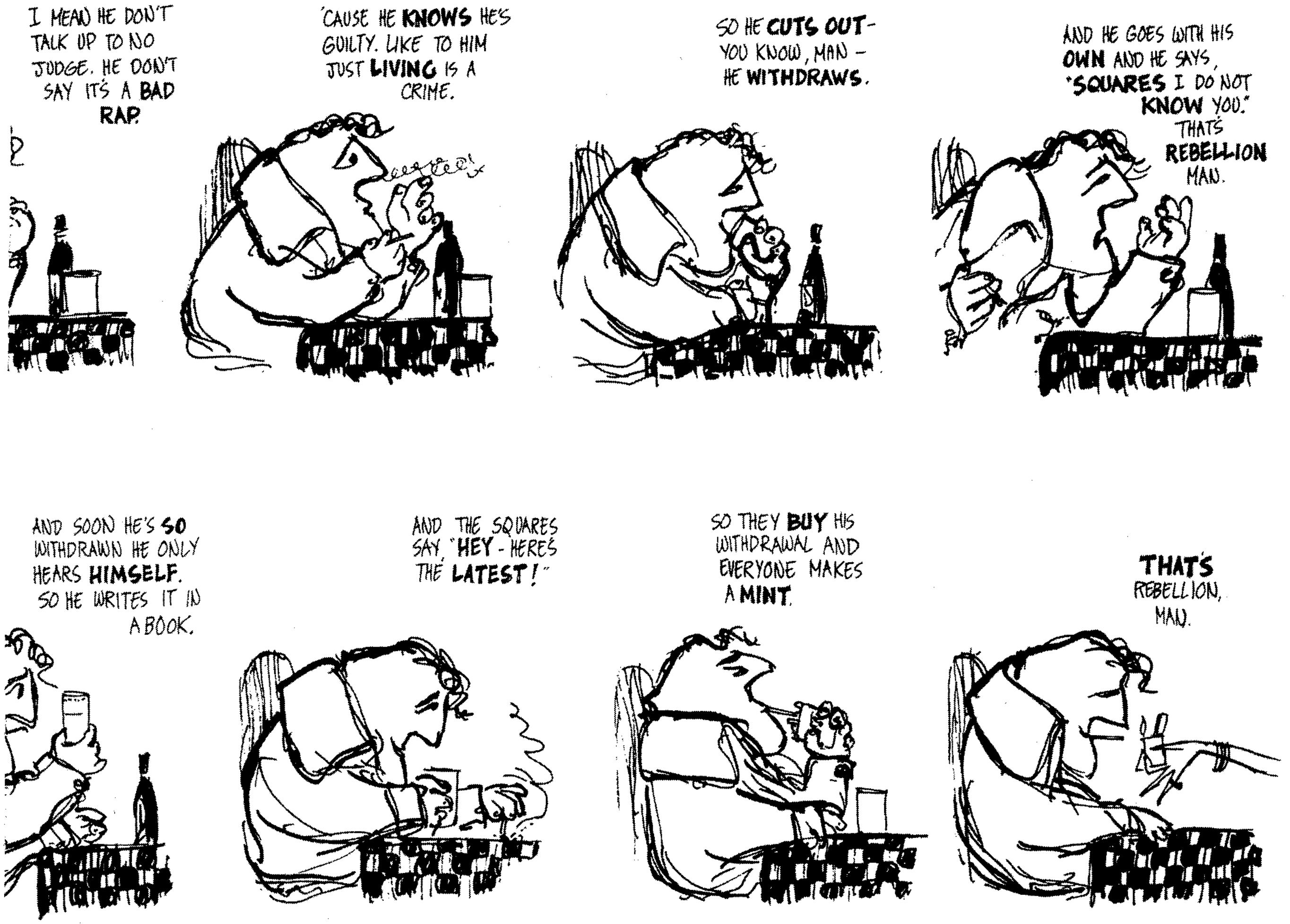
The policy got Wolf into trouble. He and Fancher were slow to reward their writers, because they assumed that, if the writers were worth more, another publication would steal them, and the *Voice* could find new ones. The paper was designed for continual turnover. This did not sit well with writers, especially once the *Voice* was plainly making money. When Wolf and Fancher sold most of their stake in the paper to Carter Burden, in 1970, for three million dollars, there was outrage. (Burden was a New York City councilman, a descendant of Cornelius Vanderbilt, and the husband of William S. Paley's stepdaughter Amanda.) The church-mouse routine did not go down well, especially with Feiffer, who had been the face of the franchise for many years—his strips were occasionally run on the cover—and who had to ask for a raise after the strip's fifteenth anniversary. "At least Wolf and Fancher could have given us a bottle of champagne," he later complained. When he finally resigned from the *Voice*, in 1997, it was because of a pay dispute.


MAN, THAT'S WHAT A REBEL IS.


AND HE LEARNS A NEW TONGUE - LIKE A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE - AND WHEN THE SQUARES COME AROUND, HE SAYS "WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?" THAT'S REBELLION MAN.

FANTAGRAPHICS

Wolf considered his editorial policy as philosophy. "The *Village Voice* was originally conceived as a living, breathing attempt to demolish the notion that one needs to be a professional to accomplish something in a field as purportedly technical as journalism," he wrote in the introduction to "The Village Voice Reader," in 1962. "It was a philosophical position. We wanted to jam the gears of creeping automatism." Journalism is a profession entirely by self-description. You do not need a degree, license, or credential of any kind to be a journalist. So the need to define and maintain a professional identity is at least as strong in the case of journalists as it is for lawyers and college professors. It was its insouciance toward this identity that made the *Voice* such an influential force. There were many regular columnists in the *Voice's* early history;


I MEAN HE DON'T TALK UP TO NO JUDGE. HE DON'T SAY IT'S A BAD RAP.
'CAUSE HE KNOWS HE'S GUILTY. LIKE TO HIM JUST LIVING IS A CRIME.
SO HE CUTS OUT - YOU KNOW, MAN - HE WITHDRAWS.
AND HE GOES WITH HIS OWN AND HE SAYS, 'SQUARES I DO NOT KNOW YOU.' THAT'S REBELLION MAN.
AND SOON HE'S SO WITHDRAWN HE ONLY HEARS HIMSELF. SO HE WRITES IT IN A BOOK.
AND THE SQUARES SAY, "HEY - HERE'S THE LATEST!"
SO THEY BUY HIS WITHDRAWAL AND EVERYONE MAKES A MINT.
THAT'S REBELLION, MAN.

they all took inspiration from Wolf's permissiveness—their columns were often personal, sometimes rambling, occasionally contentious. *Voice* writers attacked other *Voice* writers, and this was fine, because there was no one voice of the *Voice*. "Every man his own James Reston" could have been the paper's motto. And, when everyone is James Reston, it devalues the authority of the real James Reston a little. Since devaluing authority is one of the things journalism does, this amounted to using the methods of journalism against the pretensions of mainstream journalism.

The other creator of the *Voice* formula was Jerry Tallmer. Tallmer edited and wrote theatre reviews—he was the inventor of the Obies, the Off-Broadway theatre awards that the *Voice* founded and sponsored. Tallmer's mission was to put the "I" in newspaper criticism. Impersonality and objectivity are part of the ethic of journalistic identity, just as disinterestedness and freedom of inquiry are part of the ethic of professorial identity. The *Voice* showed that you could disrespect these idols and still sell newspapers. And the world would not come to an end, either.

The *Voice* also had two stars. One was Mailer. The same month that the newspaper began publishing, Mailer's third novel, "The Deer Park," came out. Mailer dedicated it to Wolf. Though the *Voice* ran a review by Mailer's friend the Baltimore psychologist Robert Lindner, who called it "a giant step forward from his previous novels," the rest of the literary world was vicious. Mailer bought a half-page ad in the *Voice* featuring excerpts from some of the worst reviews ("Moronic Mindlessness . . . Golden Garbage Heap"—New York *Herald Tribune*). He was crushed and angry, but he saw opportunity in the wreckage, and, a few months later, in 1956, he contributed ten thousand dollars more to keep the paper going and began writing a column.

He called it "QUICKLY: A Column for Slow Readers." The name was adapted from a phrase of Gide's, which Mailer presumably got via Malaquais and which he adopted permanently as his own: "Do not understand me too quickly." As the title suggests, the column was belligerent from the start. "The only way I see myself becoming one of the cherished traditions of the Village," Mailer wrote, echoing the motto of the *Villager*, "is to be actively disliked each week." This turned out to be easily done. The column provoked letters—"This guy Mailer, he's a hostile, narcissistic pest. Lose him"—and even a parody, "Burp: A Column for People Who Can Read, by Normal Failure."

Mailer managed just seventeen columns. Tallmer was his editor, even though he hated the columns: he con-

Feiffer's strip first appeared in the Voice in 1956. He was inimitable, but, like all geniuses, he tapped into a current already live.

sidered them "turgid and unreadable." Mailer was always late submitting his copy, and when mistranscriptions crept in he was furious with Tallmer. Eventually, a typo ("nuisances" for "nuances") led to a scene in the office. Wolf accused him of behaving like "the worst cartoon caricature of a capitalist with a high hat beating the slaves," and Mailer quit. It was the end of that friendship. (Mailer wrote again for the *Voice*, but he withdrew from involvement with the paper.) The columns are not Mailer's best work; they might possibly be his worst, though with Mailer that can be a fine line. But the pieces were important. It was in them that Mailer began formulating his philosophy of hip, which he called "an American existentialism." He soon renamed the column "The Hip and the Square" (the conceit was not original: John Wilcock's long-running *Voice* column was called "The Village Square"), and much of his essay "The White Negro," which was published in a special New York issue of Irving Howe's magazine *Dissent,* in 1957, was drawn directly from the columns.

Mailer hardly invented the concept of hip, or its racial and sexual associations. It had been around since the rise of bebop, in the nineteen-forties: Broyard criticized its inauthenticity in one of his first essays, "A Portrait of the Hipster," in *Partisan Review* in 1948. And no one would call Mailer's idea of hipness a step toward racial understanding. "The same old primitivism crap in a new package," as Ralph Ellison called it, in a letter to Albert Murray. But Mailer always regarded "The White Negro" as the foundational work in his canon.

The column also helped Mailer discover that journalism suited him—though it was journalism on new terms. His column was unprofessional on purpose: like Wolf, he wanted to poke his finger in the eye of objectivity and expertise. The personal and argumentative nature of the columns led to the personal and argumentative nature of the book that got him out of his career rut, "Advertisements for Myself," published in 1959, in which "The White Negro" and every *Voice* column, with commentary, are reprinted. "Barbary Shore" and "The Deer Park" are formally ambitious books, but they are impersonal, in the aesthetic of the times. What Mailer learned at the *Voice* was the literary value of leading with your personality. He never forgot it.

TRISMEGISTUS

O Egypt, Egypt—so the great lament
Of thrice-great Hermes went—
Nothing of thy religion shall remain
Save fables, which thy children shall disdain.
His grieving eye foresaw
The world's bright fabric overthrown
Which married star to stone
And charged all things with awe.

And what, in that dismantled world, could be
More fabulous than he?
Had he existed? Was he but a name
Tacked on to forgeries which pressed the claim
Of every ancient quack—
That one could from a smoky cell
By talisman or spell
Coerce the Zodiac?

Still, still we summon him *at midnight hour*
To Milton's pensive tower,
And hear him tell again how, then and now,
Creation is a house of mirrors, how
Each herb that sips the dew
Dazzles the eye with many small
Reflections of the All—
Which, after all, is true.

—*Richard Wilbur*

The other star was Feiffer. In 1956, Feiffer showed up and arranged a deal: he would contribute a weekly comic strip free if the *Voice* would grant him complete editorial independence. Wolf was not in a position to refuse such an offer, and, anyway, editorial independence was what the *Voice* was all about. The first Feiffer strip appeared on October 24, 1956. It ran in the *Voice* (eventually, Feiffer did get paid for it) for forty-one years.

That had not been Feiffer's plan. He was born in 1929 in the East Bronx; his parents were Polish immigrants. He got his start in the golden age of comics, when the industry was wildly unregulated, working for one of the geniuses of the form, Will Eisner. Feiffer spent five years with Eisner, starting in 1946, collaborating with him on a classic crime-fighter newspaper comic called "The Spirit." Feiffer thought of Eisner as his mentor—"a rabbi of the comic art form," he called him—and Eisner thought that Feiffer was a brilliant writer. But he didn't think much of Feiffer's drawing. Humility was never Feiffer's most recognizable attribute, but he took the point. "The simplest stuff, I couldn't do" he admitted later. "Oddly, and ironically, the form I most wanted to work in, comic books, was the one I had no gift for working in." He took nine months away from "The Spirit," in 1947, to attend the Pratt Institute full time, hoping to start a career in advertising, but he had no luck, and returned to the strip. When it closed, in 1952, he had already been drafted into the Army.

By 1956, the golden age of comics was over: government hearings, and a popular attack on comic books by the psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, "Seduction of the Innocent," had driven most of the creative people out of the field. Some went to *Mad*, which, since it was a magazine and not, technically, a comic book, did not have to submit to the industry's new code of standards. But it was Feiffer's ambition to publish his own books. He wanted to be like William Steig, Saul Steinberg, and James Thurber, and he figured that he could use the *Voice* to get the attention of book publishers. "My approach to the *Voice* was totally cynical," he says in the introduction to a collection of his first decade of *Voice* strips, "Explainers" (Fantagraphics; $28.99).

Feiffer was inimitable, but, like all geniuses, he tapped into a current already live. "Sick, Sick, Sick," the original name of the strip, belongs to one of the giant upward advances in brow in the history of comedy. The pioneer and, by 1956, the prince of this moment was Mort Sahl. Sahl, who was born in Canada but who grew up in Southern California, got his start in 1953 in San Francisco at the hungry i. (The "i" stood for "intellectual.") His routine was to carry a newspaper onstage and refer to it, adding commentary so deadpan that audiences at first didn't get it. Eventually, they did. In 1955, "Mort Sahl at Sunset" became the first standup-comedy LP. It had limited distribution; his next album, "The Future Lies Ahead," in 1958, was a hit. Meanwhile, he had played the Village Vanguard to record houses in 1954. In 1958, he had a Broadway show.

The mark of the new comedy was edge. Feiffer had edge: his tone, like Sahl's—and like Tom Lehrer's, whose first major album, "An Evening Wasted with Tom Lehrer," was released in 1959—was sardonic. But his method was closer to another highbrow act, Nichols and May. Mike Nichols (a refugee from Berlin) and Elaine May were a hit from their first appearance, at the Village Vanguard, in 1957. Feiffer saw them on the television program "Omnibus" soon after, and he was knocked out. "I couldn't believe what I was watching," he said later, "because it was as if I was watching stuff completely out of my own mind in a style that was quite advanced from mine—they were much more finished than I thought I was." It was the start of a relationship. Nichols directed a show called "The World of Jules Feiffer," with music by Stephen Sondheim, based on the *Voice* strip, but the show didn't make it to New York. Later on, though, Feiffer wrote the screenplay for "Carnal Knowledge," which Nichols directed.

Nichols and May specialized in the language of received wisdom: they improvised on the way people talk when they think that they are sounding smart or hip or just impressively reasonable. This was Feiffer's specialty, too. His strips are almost always the same: people who are trying to talk their way through or around something, and end up ensnarled in their own discourse, because the discourse is not, in fact, their own. Feiffer's strips are about borrowed ways of talking, about the lack of fit between people and words, about the way that clichés take over. Two Madison Avenue copywriters (January, 1960):

> Now you take rebellion. When I was a kid we used to have *rebellion!*
>
> *Darn* right! We've sold out our integrity for a mess of status. That's our trouble.
>
> When was the last time you saw a college kid with a picket sign? We've lost the urge to *defy!*
>
> It's a conformist culture. That's *our* trouble.
>
> Small, frightened people. *That's* what we all are.
>
> Trapped by Kerouac on the left and *The New Yorker* on the right. That's our trouble.
>
> What if every copywriter in the city woke up one morning and *refused* to go in to his agency?
>
> What a *great* concept!
>
> For *weeks* not *one* single line of copy would be written!
>
> The *economy* would break down! The government would have to *nationalize* the advertising field!
>
> *A rebellion of the conformists!*
>
> The lowest common denominator strikes back!
>
> Let's begin a manifesto immediately! I can put aside my novel and work nights!
>
> *"Truth to the printed page"* shall be our watchword!
>
> [A sober pause is implied.]
>
> Well, let's not over *stimulate*. We wouldn't want to alienate our market.
>
> Here comes the coffee wagon. Let's talk more tomorrow.

It's sometimes said of this kind of humor that it succeeds by getting people to laugh at themselves, but this can't be right. People don't like to laugh at themselves. This kind of humor succeeds because it gets people to laugh at people who are exactly like themselves.

Madmen showed up regularly in Feiffer's early strips, which were written at a time when the advertising copywriter, rather than the management consultant, was the personification of the sellout. In fact, they loved Feiffer on Madison Avenue. They loved the *Voice* on Madison Avenue. Feiffer's characters were sometimes business types and politicians, but they were also some-

"With our lives, it's all about the journey. With our luggage, it's definitely about the destination."

"I'm afraid I made quite a nuisance of myself in here last night."

• •

times caricatures of the sort of people one would imagine to be *Voice* readers—beatniks, lounge lizards, modern dancers. The hip was mocked as much as the square. This was also an attribute of the new comedy: it made fun of the establishment, but it was not anti-establishment. It was merely disillusioned, which is the place where all comedy begins and ends. "The beat generation," Sahl used to say, "is a coffeehouse full of people expectantly looking at their watches waiting for the beat generation to come on."

But which Feiffer characters were the real *Voice* readers? This touches on one of the coy mysteries of journalism, which is that the reader implied by a magazine's interests and attitudes is rarely the magazine's actual reader. If the actual *Voice* reader played the bongos or wore a leotard, the paper would not have lived for a year, because very few advertisers will pay to reach coffeehouse musicians and modern dancers. As McAuliffe explains, by the time the *Voice* began making money, in the mid-nineteen-sixties, the typical reader was thirty years old and had a median family income of $18,771 (about a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars today). Almost ninety per cent of *Voice* readers had gone to college; forty per cent had done post-graduate work. Most had charge accounts at major department stores, such as Bloomingdale's. Most owned stock. Twenty per cent were *New Yorker* readers. The *Voice* was the medium through which a mainstream middle-class readership stayed in touch with its inner bohemian. It was the ponytail on the man in the gray flannel suit.

Feiffer's career took off in 1958, after his second year at the *Voice*, when a four-page anti-nuke comic strip (strangely missing from "Explainers") was picked up by newspapers around the world, and his weekly strip began to be syndicated. And why did the *Voice* suddenly take off? The necessary but not sufficient reason is that on December 7, 1962, the New York Typographical Union Local 6 went on strike. The strike lasted a hundred and fourteen days, and it changed the state of journalism. Among other effects, it produced *The New York Review of Books,* which was established, in part, in response to the absence of the *Times Book Review.* (To the founders, the fact that they didn't miss the *Times Book Review* seemed a reason for starting a review that people might read.) Another consequence of the strike was the enhancement of the *Voice's* demographics. The *Voice* had no relations with unions (as its staff would one day complain), and the editors recognized that they were the only game in town. So they expanded the paper's news coverage by writing up stories from reports on the radio, not having the resources to send out reporters, and circulation jumped from seventeen thousand to forty thousand. A second strike, in 1965, consolidated that gain, and the *Voice* became a Manhattan weekly. Even after the strike, it continued to beat *Time, Newsweek,* and *The New Yorker* in newsstand sales in the city. (The *Voice* was always primarily a newsstand publication; *The New Yorker,* for most of its history, was sold mainly by subscription.)

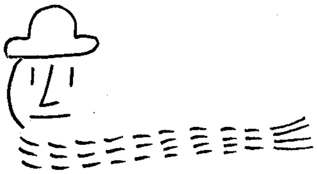
The *Voice* was a model for two very different journalistic products. One was the alternative paper. The first of the alternative, or underground, papers was the Los Angeles *Free Press,* commonly called the *Freep,* which was founded in 1964 by Arthur Kunkin. Kunkin had been inspired by a single issue he had read of the *Village Voice.* "I liked the investigative articles, their length, the mixture of culture and community," he said. What he did not like were the *Voice's* politics—a kind of centrist liberalism. Kunkin despised liberals; his paper's orientation was radical. Walter Bowart, one of the founders of the *Voice's* crosstown rival, the *East Village Other,* which was started up during the New York newspaper strike of 1965, was more blunt. The *Voice,* he said, "was a straight old safe Democratic paper, what you get when a businessman and a psychiatrist go into journalism."

That attitude was the brief glory and ultimate undoing of the alternative press. Alternative papers sorted themselves into two categories, the fists (political) and the heads (countercultural), and they were one of the most spontaneous and aggressive growths in publishing history. There were forerunners, such as *The Realist,* started, on the Lower East Side, in 1958, by a former *Mad* contributor, Paul Krassner (who had a brief career as a standup comic, with a style, as he put it, "between Lenny Bruce and Mort Sahl"). Mainly, though, the alternatives were a sixties phenomenon. In 1965, there were about half a dozen underground papers, according to the Underground Press Syndicate. By 1969, there were five hundred, with a readership ranging from two million to four and a half million. The Los Angeles *Free Press* claimed a circulation of ninety-five thousand, second only to the *Voice* among weekly newspapers; the *Berkeley Barb* had eighty-five thousand readers, the *East Village Other* sixty-five thousand. But, after 1970, the alternative press died out. This was partly because people stopped demonstrating and smoking dope, and started reading the New York *Times*—and the *Village Voice*, which had maintained, on the whole, a skeptical detachment from the hippies and the radical left. But it was also because, after the alternative papers had proved that there was a market for the coverage of "youth culture," the mainstream publications moved into the field.

The other journalistic form to which the *Voice* showed the way had a completely different demographic. This was the commercial magazine writing that flourished in the nineteen-sixties, the so-called New Journalism. Since some New Journalists—notably Tom Wolfe, in the introduction to his anthology "The New Journalism," published in 1973—claimed to be doing interesting things with some supposed distinction between the techniques of fact and fiction, the New Journalism acquired academic cachet. But the style did not develop from a theory. The New Journalism was basically the result of the discovery that you could report any subject by adapting an already existing journalistic genre in which personality, attitude, and the use of literary techniques, even a little artful manipulation for effect, were perfectly acceptable: the celebrity profile. The models for most of the magazine writers associated with the New Journalism were not the works of Charles Dickens and Stephen Crane. They were pieces like Lillian Ross's profile of Ernest Hemingway, "How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?" (*The New Yorker*, 1950); Tom Morgan's "What Makes Sammy Jr. Run?" (*Esquire*, 1959) and "Brigitte Bardot: Problem Child" (*Look*, 1960); and Gay Talese's profile of Floyd Patterson, "The Loser" (*Esquire*, 1964), and his immortal "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold" (*Esquire*, 1965). The stylistic markers of the New Journalism were in all those pieces. The trick was expanding the range of subjects, downward into strange subcultures and outward into political campaigns and, eventually, the war in Vietnam. New subject matter was as much the point of the development as new technique.

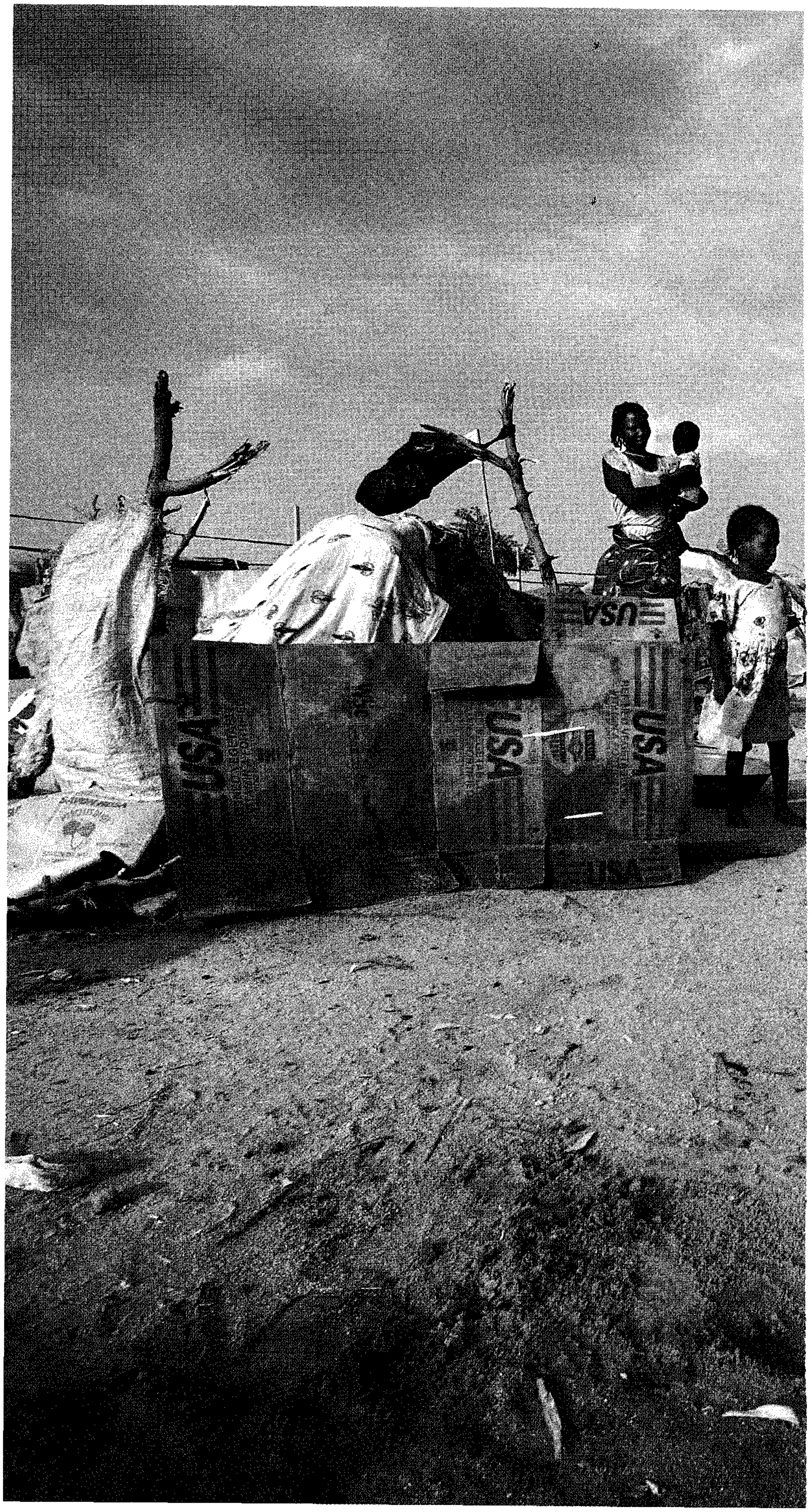
Mailer was one of the first to see the possibilities. In 1960, he was sitting in a club, the Five Spot, having a fight with Adele Morales, when he was approached by Clay Felker, who was then an ambitious young editor at *Esquire*. Felker proposed a piece on the 1960 Democratic Convention; Mailer accepted; and the result was the famous "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," published in *Esquire* in November, 1960, the month that Kennedy was elected President. "I had some dim intuitive feeling that what was wrong with all journalism is that the reporter tended to be objective and that that was one of the great lies of all time," Mailer said. His piece changed that. (The publisher and founding editor of *Esquire*, Arnold Gingrich, hated it—"This isn't writing," he is supposed to have said. "It's just smearing anything on the page that comes into his head." And he changed the headline to "Superman Comes to the Supermart." Mailer was livid, and briefly refused to write for *Esquire*.)

A year and a half later, Gingrich pushed Felker out, after Felker got into a shouting match with Mort Sahl in a club called Basin Street East. (Neither man was ever admired for his equanimity.) Felker was taken on as a consultant to the New York *Herald Tribune*, where he became the editor of the paper's Sunday magazine section, *New York*. Tom Wolfe, Dick Schaap, and Jimmy Breslin were his regular writers. The newspaper strike put them all temporarily out of work, which is how Wolfe ended up writing for *Esquire*, where, in 1963, he published his piece about customized cars, known for short as "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby," the biggest splash of the New Journalism. (Gingrich had been replaced by Harold Hayes. No editor is more closely associated with the New Journalism than Hayes, but he considered the concept pretentious. He thought that journalists in the nineteen-sixties had simply become unhinged.) The newspaper strikes eventually killed the *Herald Tribune*, and, in 1968, Felker founded the magazine *New York*. Six years later, *New York* took over the *Village Voice* from Carter Burden. It was the natural move, like AOL buying Time Warner. The *Voice* was the original for everything that Felker had tried to do.



Felker's magazine formula was not countercultural. "Print must be for the educated and affluent élite," he liked to say. (As one of his editors put it, "We're editing the magazine for the people Clay had lunch with.") This wisdom may be good for the business side, but the reader does not like to think of the content as mere worms for an advertiser's hook. More important, it traduces the self-conception of the journalist. In 1974, Felker, despite having promised that there would be "no clean sweep" of the *Voice* staff, fired Wolf and Fancher as editor and publisher. "You're a very neurotic man, Mr. Felker," Wolf told him when they parted, "and someday the same thing is going to happen to you." That is usually a safe prediction in the magazine business. Felker's expensive effort to make the *Voice* into a national newspaper failed, and, in 1977, he lost control of the property to Rupert Murdoch.

The Murdoch purchase did not end the *Voice's* distinctiveness. It was a durable brand. Of course, the paper will share the fate of every other print medium in the digital age, whatever fate that is. Still, more than other magazines and newspapers, the *Voice* was doing what the Internet does now long before there was an Internet. The *Voice* was the blogosphere—whose motto might be "Every man his own Norman Mailer"—and Craigslist fifty years before their time. The *Voice* also helped to create the romance of the journalistic vocation by making journalism seem a calling, a means of self-expression, a creative medium. It opened up an insecure and defensively self-important profession. Until its own success made it irresistible to buyers who imagined that they could do better with a business plan than its founders had done from desperation and instinct, it had the courage to live by its wits. ♦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International hardship

BY JONATHAN

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a million Sudanese who have fled to the area and are now caught between

I. THE WAR SEASON

Everything is fine, until the moment when it is not. And when that moment comes it can be very quick and very bad.

This is what Aiméry Mbounkap tells me on a Saturday afternoon in November of 2007. Mbounkap works as a site planner for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. He is a robustly built man of about thirty, an architect by training and saturnine by disposition. We are sitting in the common room of a U.N.H.C.R. field office situated on the eastern frontier of the African nation of Chad, thirty-five miles from the Darfur border. Along that border, the U.N.H.C.R. oversees the operation of twelve refugee camps with a population of nearly two hundred and fifty thousand Sudanese who have fled to Chad to escape death, mayhem, and ethnic cleansing.

The rainy season in Chad ended more than a month ago. Now that the rutted, undulating roads are again passable, it is the season of war. Aiméry Mbounkap's preoccupation with bad moments that arrive unexpectedly is the result of reports, as yet unconfirmed, about a column of Chadian rebels gathering to the south of here. The rumors have come from the nearby village market and they are perfectly plausible, given that war has broken out in Chad with near-seasonal predictability every year at this time in recent years.

This field office is one of six U.N.H.C.R. outposts ranged along the eastern frontier of Chad. The compound consists of two sandy, sun-scorched acres, several low, whitewashed buildings, and a cluster of thatch-roofed huts where seven international staff members live and work. The national staff—some thirty Chadian employees—report here to work every day but live outside the compound. The field office meets the U.N.H.C.R.'s minimum security standards for eastern Chad, which call for a wall two metres high strung with razor wire, a metal gate, and a contingent of security guards, called CopGuards. The guards are dressed in black uniforms, which is meant to give them a menacing paramilitary aspect, but they are unarmed (by U.N. regulation), barely trained, and mostly teen-agers. Their job, for which they are paid around two dollars a day, consists in opening and closing the gate and keeping watch at night.

The Chadian rebel groups, of which there are at least half a dozen, formed largely along ethnic and familial lines, are not known to single out aid organizations for attack, but they are loosely organized, indifferently disciplined, and well armed. Some rebels, and also some Chadian Army recruits, have been known to freelance as hooligans and *coupeurs de route*—highway bandits—when they are not soldiering. The week before I arrived, in the middle of a sprawling refugee camp three miles from this field office, a U.N.H.C.R. worker named Ali Abderaman watched two young men in white robes walk past the Toyota Land Cruiser in which he and a driver were sitting. It was eleven-thirty in the morning. Abderaman saw the men pause, exchange a few words, and come back. To talk, he thought, but they drew out AK-47s concealed in their robes and pointed the muzzles at his head.

AND HERE'S A LITTLE SOMETHING I CALL A-FLAT.
PIANO-TUNING BAR

A photograph of that Land Cruiser, with its blue U.N.H.C.R. logo, is tacked like a forlorn memento on a bulletin board in the field office. Ali Abderaman, frightened but uninjured, last saw it heading overland, across the desert scree, in the direction of the border. Since October of 2005, more than eighty-two vehicles—from Oxfam, CARE, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, Save the Children, and various entities of the United Nations, such as the World Food Program and UNICEF—have been stolen or hijacked on the eastern frontier, usually in daylight on the open road, or in refugee camps, and occasionally at night, when armed men assaulted a compound.

The field offices of relief organizations present alluring targets for men with guns. Parked in the courtyard here are five Land Cruisers and one large truck, all kept in a state of good repair by a team of mechanics. The communications room is full of satellite and VHF radio equipment, items of particular value in a region where there are no telephone lines, cell-phone service, or other means of communication. The office of Gervais Koutangni, the *chef de bureau* of this field office at the time of my visit, contains a safe full of cash, sometimes as much as thirty thousand dollars, to pay sundry expenses.

The United Nations classifies eastern Chad as a level-E duty station, the most extreme of its five hardship categories. In the normal rotation, these employees must remain here for at least two years before they can apply for another duty station. They receive hardship pay and, for every six weeks in country, one week of leave, which they are required to take for their psychological well-being.

In the common room, Aiméry Mbounkap continues his lamentations.

He returned only yesterday from his week of leave, at home in Cameroon with his wife and children. Now he glumly faces the prospect of another six weeks here. He tells me that several months ago a group of Sudanese rebels were encamped in the hills nearby, perhaps so that the soldiers could visit their families in the refugee camp. Mbounkap frequently heard the crackling of small-arms fire.

The governments of Chad and Sudan have repeatedly denounced each other for supporting rebel groups—accusations that are manifestly true, as the President of Chad, Idriss Déby, well knows. Years ago, Déby himself built and commanded a rebel army from a base in Darfur. On November 10, 1990—the war season—Déby swept across the border to depose the existing regime. Ever since, one Chadian warlord or another has tried to do the same to him.

I leave Aiméry Mbounkap and cross the dusty courtyard. It is autumn here, a hundred degrees under the noon sun, but the air is bone-dry and tolerable in the shade. A CopGuard lets me out the compound door into a terra-cotta landscape, a hard-baked alkaline terrain of rust-colored rock and thorny scrub, broken now and then by stretches of shifting sand. Two hundred yards down the road, a Chadian family lives in a small cluster of *tukuls*, mud-brick dwellings with conical thatched roofs. It is a suburb of the village proper, which is half a mile distant, beyond a grove of mango trees.

Three other relief organizations also have small outposts here, near the U.N.H.C.R. field office. I cross the street and enter the World Food Program compound, where I am billeted in a *tukul* of my own. Francis Béré, the *chef de bureau* and the only other person who lives in this compound, convenes his Chadian workers here every morning, and in the evening he fixes himself dinner on a small stove and eats alone.

"There is trouble," he announces grimly. "The rebels have come into Hadjer Hadid."

Hadjer Hadid is a small village sixteen miles to the south, where there are two large refugee camps with nearly fifty thousand inhabitants. I ask Béré what happened when the rebels came into the village.

"It's market day in Hadjer Hadid, and the rebels came in and fired their weapons," he says. "Not at anyone, just in the air. People ran away, and the rebels looted the market."

He is interrupted by a call on his radio. He answers and listens without saying anything. It's a report from one of his Chadian workers in Hadjer Hadid.

"The gendarmes at the camps ran off," Béré tells me. Small contingents of armed Chadian gendarmes, paid by the U.N.H.C.R., are assigned to maintain order at each refugee camp. "One of the gendarmes was caught by the rebels," Béré adds. "I think he is dead now."

Are the gendarmes fighting the rebels?

Béré laughs softly. "No, they just take off their uniforms and disappear. They are hiding from the rebels."

Béré is forty-one, from Burkina Faso, where he has a wife and three children, the youngest a year-old boy. He is afflicted with loneliness. When he goes home on leave, his young son does not recognize him. His last duty station, in Pakistan, was also non-family.

Gervais Koutangni, the U.N.H.C.R. *chef de bureau*, lumbers toward us. He is a big man, slow-moving. Retirement is still some years off but visible on his horizon. He sits heavily in a chair across from Béré. "The rebels have a hundred vehicles occupying Hadjer Hadid," he says. "We don't know what will happen, what they will do. If they will do anything."

Béré thinks it unlikely that the rebels will stop here. At least, he says, they did not last year, when he watched a heavily armed column speed by on the main road, not a hundred yards from the compound. They were headed seventy miles west of here to do battle with government forces in Abéché, one of the largest cities in Chad, and also the administrative center for the relief organizations with field offices on the frontier. When the rebels finally withdrew, two days later, the streets of Abéché were littered with the smoking hulks of military vehicles and dozens of dead. The U.N., which had evacuated some of its personnel, lost a million dollars' worth of blankets, tents, medical supplies, and communications equipment. Thieves ransacked the World Food Program warehouses and made off with five hundred tons of provisions meant for the refugee camps.

"Headquarters told me to prepare an evacuation plan," Koutangni says. "We have five vehicles, four drivers, eighteen people to take out. What do you have?" he asks Béré.

"Two vehicles and the truck," Béré says. "Two drivers." He falls into silent calculation. "Twelve people to take out."

"You are part of the evacuation plan," Béré tells me. "According to headquarters, you will go with the World Food Program."

II. FIRST RESPONDERS

The great diaspora from Darfur began in the spring of 2003, when the government of Sudan, led by a regime of Arab supremacists, embarked on a campaign to crush an uprising by the black African farmers of Darfur. The government's strategy was to obliterate the villages in which the rebellion had arisen. The favored tactic was to drop rudimentary bombs—fifty-five-gallon drums packed with explosives and scrap metal—from old Antonov cargo planes, followed by an assault on the villagers by mounted Arab militias known as the *janjaweed*, the "demons on horseback." The *janjaweed* killed those who had not fled into the bush, poisoned wells with their corpses, raped girls and women, set buildings ablaze, destroyed stocks of food and seed, trampled fields, and hacked down fruit trees.

Tens of thousands of villagers, most of them women and children, set off across the bleak Sahel landscape in search of refuge. Many dispersed throughout Darfur, and others headed toward the border with Chad. They arrived in Chad with few possessions, and camped on the outskirts of villages and towns. For the most part, the Chadian villagers greeted them with compassion, offering water and food. The refugees hoped to return soon to their homeland, but, as the months wore on, more refugees arrived, bearing horrific accounts of *janjaweed* atrocities in one village after another.

The carnage in Darfur continued for many months before it became known to the outside world. At its headquarters in Geneva, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees did not begin tracking the movements of the refugees until the late summer of 2003. That fall, it sent a team to investigate.

The first team was followed by a second, an Emergency Response Team led by Yvan Sturm, a forty-five-year-old Swiss national and a veteran of many dangerous and chaotic refugee situations. He had a lean, muscular build, short-cropped hair the color of metal filings, and a passport that bore entry and exit stamps from the following killing grounds: Kosovo, Afghanistan, Somalia, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Burundi, Rwanda, and Zaire. In his spare time, he climbed mountains.

Yvan Sturm, a U.N.H.C.R. team leader, reads his e-mail via a satellite-phone connection. Photograph by Helene Caux.

"I decided to go with a small team, just six other people," Sturm told me. "I wanted to take a look at the situation, and I wanted to be able to move fast." In Geneva, he chose the specialists he would need, going through a roster of forty U.N.H.C.R. volunteers who had recently completed a rigorous training program in the forests of southern Germany. For ten days, these men and women had lived in tents and faced simulated confrontations with armed groups, courtesy of the German Ministry of the Interior and the federal police. They were trained in dealing with angry crowds and hostile checkpoints, hostage situations, travel in rough terrain, setting up communications networks, and, of course, planning and building refugee camps. For the Chad operation, Sturm had in mind several people of varied expertise who had reportedly worked well together during the exercise. He needed someone skilled in security, someone in telecom, another in logistics, one in administration, and an expert in the legal rights of refugees.

Before Sturm's departure from Geneva, a Beechcraft King Air, a twin-engine turboprop that the U.N.H.C.R. had stationed in the Congo, was requisitioned. He instructed the crew to fly the plane to N'Djamena and await his arrival. He arranged to have shipped to Chad several Thuraya satellite phones, VHF radios, laptop computers, and a fax machine. Those supplies came from a vast emergency stockpile in Copenhagen. The warehouse also contained twenty fully equipped Toyota Land Cruisers and large quantities of supplies for refugees—two hundred and fifty thousand blankets, tens of thousands of rolls of plastic sheeting, canvas tents, and kitchen sets with aluminum pots, bowls, cups, and plates—items that Sturm could begin distributing once he understood the dimensions of the crisis on the Chadian frontier.

Sturm flew from Geneva to Paris, where Air France still maintained the only commercial flight from Europe to Chad, a legacy of its French colonial past. At Charles de Gaulle airport he met the other members of his team, who had flown in from disparate parts of the world. They left Paris at six o'clock that evening, arrived in N'Djamena at midnight, and disembarked into the African heat and clouds of mosquitoes. Sturm saw the Beechcraft from Kinshasa parked on the tarmac.

Sturm's team faced enormous logistical problems. Chad occupied an area three times the size of Germany and had less than seven hundred miles of paved roads, with two traffic lights in N'Djamena, neither of them functioning. The country was landlocked, the nearest port six hundred miles away, in Cameroon. The capital was a vast slum of seven hundred thousand people, the sky at dusk a purpuric haze from the smoke of wood cooking fires, the exhaust of ancient colonial-era vehicles, and windblown sand.

Relief workers being evacuated to Cameroon after rebels attacked N'Djamena, the Chadian capital. Photograph by Jan Garrup.

NOOR

In gullies alongside unpaved city streets, goats rummaged in trash and human excrement. The rest of the country had no electrical grid, no water or sewage system. Chad ranked fifth from the bottom in a U.N. index of human development. Three-quarters of the population of nine million were illiterate. Nearly one out of two people did not live to age forty.

The country was plagued by lawlessness, ethnic strife, widespread corruption, and political instability. In the years since Idriss Déby had seized power, he had engineered fraudulent elections, enriched himself, and dispensed favors to his inner circle.

The extraction of oil in southern Chad held the promise of alleviating the country's extreme poverty. To bring the oil to market, Déby entered into an agreement, in 2000, with the World Bank and several oil companies to finance a pipeline to the Atlantic terminals in Cameroon. In exchange, Déby agreed to use most of the oil revenues to build schools, hospitals, and roads. The oil brought more than a billion dollars a year to Déby's regime. He spent much of it on the military, fending off rebel armies. The rest was lost to corruption, shoddy, half-built projects, and numbered bank accounts outside Chad. In September of 2008, the World Bank withdrew from the project.

The events in Darfur have a direct bearing on the political instability in Chad. The Sudanese government supports the Chadian rebels with bases in Darfur and with money. The possibility of a successful coup d'état by one or another of the rebel groups raises the spectre of a regime even worse than Déby's. As a Western diplomat in Chad told me, "This government is one-man deep. If he goes, the country falls into absolute chaos."

From N'Djamena, Sturm and his team flew four hundred miles across Chad to Abéché, a hundred miles from the Darfur border. The French military maintains an outpost there and had just finished paving a runway to accommodate a pair of Mirage jets. Sturm's team moved into a house and an adjoining building, which they used as a temporary headquarters. He hired a Land Cruiser and, early one morning, departed on a four-hour journey overland to the frontier with Sudan.

In midafternoon, he arrived in Adré, a town of ten thousand inhabitants directly across the border with Darfur. Travelling along the border, he saw hundreds of people encamped in makeshift shelters of reeds and straw, with rags and tattered blankets suspended overhead on sticks. Under the midday sun, the temperature could soar to a hundred and ten degrees. Dry winds and sand storms parched the terrain and sucked moisture from anything animate. Women and children dug deep into the sand of the dry riverbeds to find water and foraged miles into the countryside collecting wood to sell at the markets. As Sturm and his team continued along the border, the hundreds became thousands. About seventy-five per cent were women and children, hollow-eyed and lank-skinned from hunger and despair and fatigue. Interviews conducted later by Human Rights Watch and Doctors Without Borders told of families being burned alive in their homes, and of men who had been forced to watch, in the moments before their own deaths, as their wives and daughters were raped. Some refugees had been there for months, and more came every day. Every so often, they saw in the distance a column of black smoke rising from another burning village. In the month before Sturm's arrival, thirty thousand new refugees had crossed into Chad. The total number gathered along the four-hundred-mile border with Darfur, by rough estimates, came to seventy-seven thousand.

Sturm had a pragmatic cast of mind. The scene evoked in him a sense of urgency, but it neither shocked him nor caused him great distress. "I had been involved in other situations that were just as bad, even worse," Sturm told me. Years earlier, in Goma, eastern Zaire, he'd been part of a team trying to cope with a million refugees and an outbreak of cholera that, at its peak, had killed seven thousand people a week.

"What preoccupied me most was water," Sturm said. "It's like gold in that region. The wind and sand will dry you up within two hours. Second, I had to get them away from the border to safety. The *janjaweed* were making raids across the border, stealing cattle and killing people."

Sturm spent that night in Adré, where Doctors Without Borders had opened a small clinic. The immediate task was to get food, water, and temporary shelter to the refugees, and then begin the process of registering them, finding out precisely how many there were and where they had come from. To accomplish that, Sturm had to set up several field offices at intervals along the border and bring in people and equipment to run those offices. He and his team had to identify potential sites for refugee camps, which required negotiations with the Chadian government and the tribal chiefs among the refugees. Technical experts—hydrologists and engineers—had to be brought in to determine whether those sites had sufficient water to support thousands of refugees. The land had to be cleared, tents set up, water pipes laid, latrines dug. The U.N.H.C.R. attempted to place the refugee camps at least fifty kilometres from zones of conflict. To transport the refugees to the camps, Sturm had to assemble an armada of vehicles and get them across Chad, over hundreds of miles of rocky roads, to the Darfur border.

By the following week, support staff had begun to arrive in Abéché and on the frontier. Supplies were en route from the warehouse in Copenhagen and from other stockpiles in Gibraltar and Kenya. With money and technical assistance from the U.N.H.C.R., a Chadian government commission registered and interviewed refugees along the border. Teams of technicians came from Norway and Germany to search for water, drill wells, and plan campsites. The Italians sent a medical unit to work alongside the Chadian Red Cross and the Dutch and Belgian divisions of Doctors Without Borders. The Germans took charge of managing a fleet of Land Cruisers and heavy trucks brought in by the U.N.H.C.R., Sweden, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The operation that began with Sturm and his crew of six grew, within a span of weeks, to dozens, and within a few months to hundreds. Many were Chadian national staff members, their salaries paid by the U.N.H.C.R. Sturm spent half of his time in the office in Abéché coördinating the various parties, going to the camps whenever he could. In less than two weeks, thousands of refugees had received blankets, kitchen sets, jerry cans for water, and plastic tarpaulins. Sturm heard that in the village markets the tarpaulins handed out by the U.N.H.C.R. were showing up for sale at the equivalent of twenty-five dollars apiece. Some of the recipients—mostly women and children—may have sold the tarps, but Sturm also got reports that men from outside the camps were taking these and other items by force. He called a halt to the distributions and accelerated efforts to get the camps in working order.

The first refugee camp, known as Farchana, for the village nearby, officially opened on Saturday afternoon, January 17, 2004. The German and the Norwegian engineers had prepared the site, bulldozed a road, and overseen the assembly of tents into discrete blocks separated by lanes and footpaths. The first arrivals—a hundred and forty-eight women, children, and the elderly—came aboard a convoy of four trucks and one bus from the village of Ouendalou, south of Adré. The camp was intended to accommodate eight thousand refugees. In time, that figure grew to more than twenty thousand.

III. THE THREE "M"*S*

Shortly after I arrived in Chad, I met a young woman who worked for a large, well-known humanitarian organization. She and another woman, a colleague, were sitting in rattan chairs on the veranda of the Hotel Meridien in N'Djamena, a building that dated to French colonial days—the sort of place where ceiling fans twirl slowly overhead and gardeners are always tending the lawn and the bougainvillea. The young woman—I will call her Carole—had been in Chad for two months, on her second foreign assignment for the humanitarian organization. In many ways, she fit the profile of young, well-educated aid workers: in search of adventure in an exotic locale, and inspired by a vague desire to do good. Some end up devoting their lives to the work. Many more come and go within six months or a year.

Carole was stationed far to the east, in Abéché, a town once known among aid workers as a place of drunken weekend revelries and romantic flings. But, with rebel armies now roaming the eastern landscape, the government had declared a state of emergency in Abéché and imposed a six-thirty curfew, strictly enforced by checkpoints and pickups full of soldiers with AK-47s and RPGs.

Carole was twenty-nine, with shoulder-length blond hair. She had the dull, glazed eyes of someone who has witnessed an accident that she cannot get out of her mind. She listened to my questions and replied coherently, but her thoughts were elsewhere. She fell silent when the conversation did not directly involve her.

She lived in a compound in Abéché that was maintained by her aid organization and, like the U.N.H.C.R. field offices, was walled, razor-wired, and CopGuarded. "It's me and three guys," she told me. "At breakfast, we talk about the day ahead. At 7 A.M., we're driven out to the office, a concrete building with three air-conditioned rooms. We're at our desks by seven-fifteen. At six o'clock, we're driven back to the guesthouse for dinner, and we continue working after dinner. I go to sleep at eight-thirty or nine. Day after day after day like this—it's like being in a prison. I'm starting to lose my mind. I'm no good to anyone if I'm feeling that way."

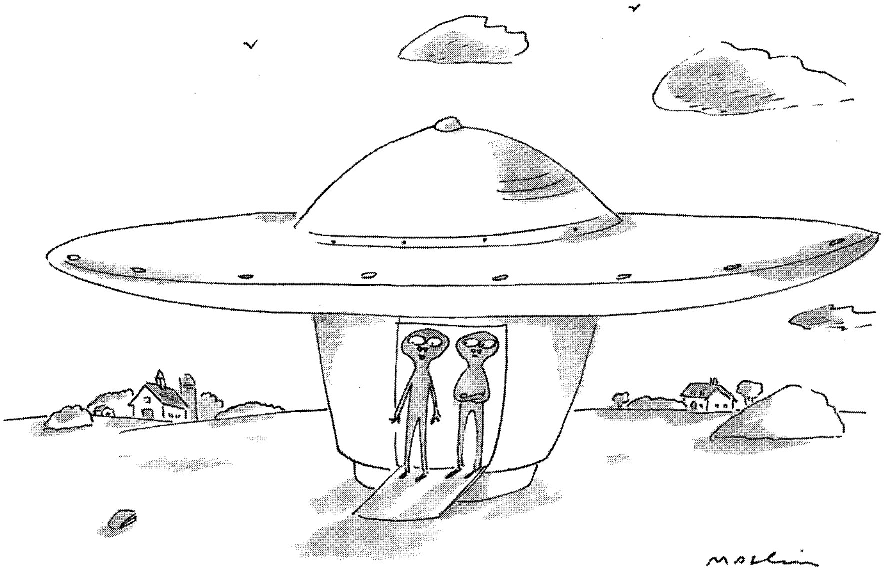
Carole had come to N'Djamena to stay with a friend for a few days and regain her equilibrium. The friend cast an occasional concerned glance at her. She was only a few years older than Carole, but she had many more years of experience in Africa.

As near as I could figure, Carole's friend was utterly fearless. One night, she took me to a tiny restaurant run by two Chadian women. She drove through the dark, chaotic streets of N'Djamena in her agency's jeep, past sheds and mud-brick buildings where groups gathered around small cooking fires, past an endless procession of people along the road, all coming into view and going out again as the headlights swept by. The restaurant was in a dim, stony courtyard lit by kerosene lanterns, and consisted of a few plastic tables and chairs. She knew the women who ran the place and greeted them warmly. She ignored the cold stares from a table of men drinking beer in the shadows.

Over a meal of fried plantains and bony fish from the Chari River, she told me that, among the variety of aid workers, two broad categories stood out: the runners and the seekers. The runners were fleeing their past lives; the seekers were looking for adventure or enlightenment. She was a runner, she said, but offered no details.

She went on to say that she had reached a point in her life where she must make a choice. She was thirty-three, young enough to return to her country and try to establish a life with marriage, children, and a home. Or she could continue on as she was, with reassignments every few years and little chance for marriage and children. "Look around," she said, "and you'll see that this business is full of women thirty-five to forty-five who are strong, competent, good at what they do, and single." She had never had a long-term relationship. She must make a choice, she said. It seemed to me that she already had.

Another aid worker in N'Djamena, in her early thirties, told me that there was a more cynical categorization—the three "M"s, she called it: missionaries, misfits, and mercenaries. Missionaries and misfits I understood, but not mercenaries. "This can be a well-paying business, depending on the organization you work for," she explained. "If you work for the U.N.—and just about everybody wants to work for the U.N.—your salary is not taxed, you get hardship pay, time off, and a lot of your expenses are covered. Especially if you come from Africa, or any developing country, it's very difficult to find a job that pays as well."



"There's my wallet—right where I left it."

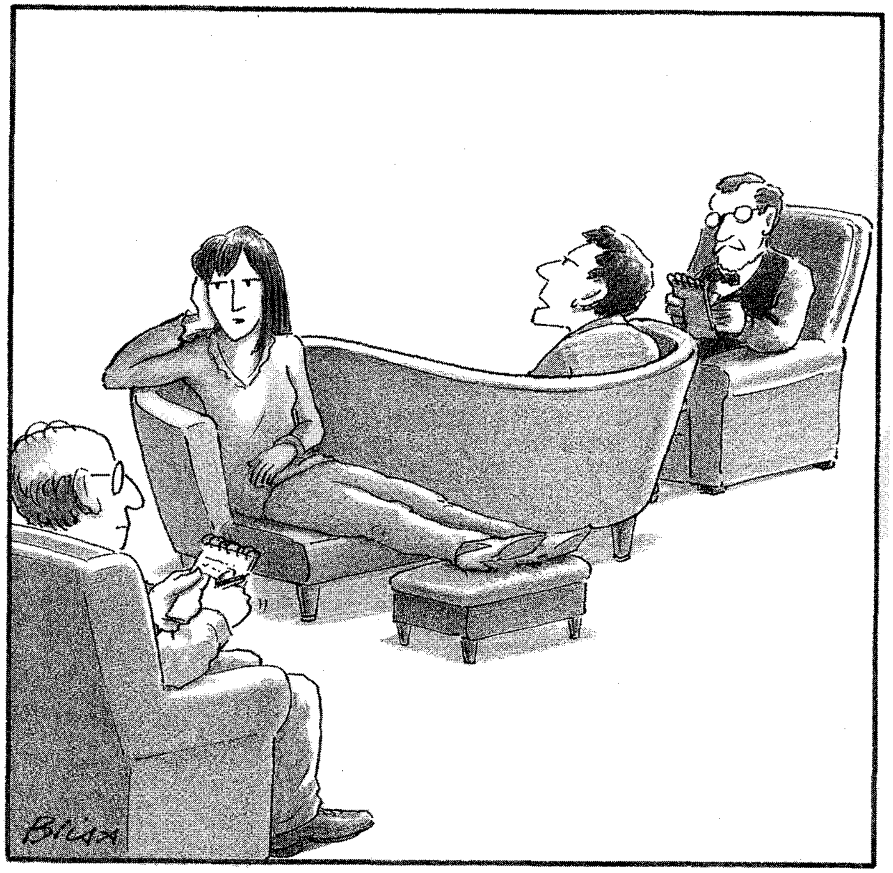
Serge Malé, who is French and a medical doctor by training, runs the U.N.H.C.R.'s operations out of a dilapidated colonial-era villa near the center of N'Djamena. Sixteen months in country when I met him, he found that every day brought to his door a fresh crisis of one sort or another—"*le problème du jour*," he called it. He appeared to relish the problems. "My philosophy," he told me, "is don't take yourself seriously, but do what you do seriously."

I was one of Malé's smaller problems of the day. He was trying to arrange a ride for me on a U.N.H.C.R. plane to Abéché. His real aim, however, was to impress upon me his view of the refugees. "People tend to treat them as a group, one more camp of twenty thousand refugees," he said. "But they have names, hopes, lives, loves. You have to see them as individuals."

When I reached Abéché, I saw that the U.N.H.C.R. compound there had grown from the building occupied four years earlier by Yvan Sturm and his team to encompass four contiguous properties and a dozen buildings, all surrounded by an eight-foot wall crowned with helices of concertina wire. Seventy-six people, not counting the drivers and the CopGuards, work there full time, in air-conditioned offices—most of them cramped, with two or three desks jammed together. There is an environmental officer, a water-and-sanitation officer, a food-and-nutrition officer, a fleet manager, and a public-information officer, who has an assistant. There are officers for finance, administration, registration, community services, supply, telecom, and gender protection, along with assorted deputies, clerks, and assistants.

The *chef de bureau* was Catherine Huck, who had been ten months in country. The six U.N.H.C.R. field offices strung along the eastern frontier report to her, and she reports to the U.N.H.C.R. country headquarters, in N'Djamena. Huck is French and in her mid-forties, and has blond hair cropped at ear length and wears tortoiseshell spectacles. She has spent much of her adult life working for the U.N. Her tour of duty in Chad, like that of most international employees, is two years, although some stay longer. "Two years is O.K.," she told me. "Not one more day."

The U.N.H.C.R. staff in Abéché over-



sees the work of most other aid organizations. Even the largest and best known receive money from the U.N.H.C.R. to carry out operations in Chad. (Two exceptions, Doctors Without Borders and the Red Cross, prefer to work on their own.) The aid organizations must file regular reports with the U.N.H.C.R., explaining how and to what effect the money has been spent. People here evaluate those reports and file their own reports and financial assessments, which go to headquarters in N'Djamena, where reports on the reports are written and dispatched to headquarters in Geneva.

As a consequence, most people in this compound spend most of their time in front of their computers or in meetings. Because of the dusk-to-dawn curfew, there is, in any event, little else to do apart from work. Even in broad daylight, almost no one sets foot outside.

Angele Djohossou, from Benin, was the senior protection officer for the refugees, a position of rank in the U.N.H.C.R. hierarchy, even if the organization likes to consider itself non-hierarchical. Her job, which requires a law degree, is to insure the refugees' physical safety and their legal rights under the 1969 Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention. Of late, her main preoccupation has been domestic violence and rape, a daily occurrence outside the refugee camps when women collect wood for cooking and to sell.

Angele came to Chad directly from a tour of duty in Afghanistan. She was first assigned to run the U.N.H.C.R. field office in Bahai, in northern Chad, on the edge of the Sahara. Of all the difficult places in Chad, Bahai is the most difficult, desolate and windblown, with fierce sand storms that last for days, and unrestrained banditry. The living conditions for aid workers are primitive, with little privacy, no fresh fruits or vegetables, and temperatures ranging from freezing at night to a hundred and twenty degrees during the day. The field office was neither air-conditioned nor heated.

On transferring to Abéché, after fourteen months in Bahai, Angele sought space to live. She rented a large house near the U.N.H.C.R. compound. She lived there for seven months, until an evening in July, when six men with Kalashnikovs broke through the front gate and overpowered the two CopGuards on duty. The house came with a gardener, whom Angele called Baba. "He was old—no one knew how old," Angele recalled. "He looked about ninety. He didn't do very much, but he was kind."

The bandits shot and killed the gardener. Angele happened to be in Togo, on her week of leave, and learned of the robbery and murder in an e-mail from Abéché. On her return, she never again set foot in the house. She moved into the main compound, where Catherine Huck and a few other senior staff members lived.

Among the eight or nine white Land Cruisers parked in the courtyard of the Abéché compound, I noticed one with a faded blue insignia, hands reaching around a stylized globe, and, under that, the faint words "Aide Publique au Développement." Those words had been scrubbed into near-invisibility, and the vehicle now bore a fresh U.N.H.C.R. insignia.

I asked the fleet manager, Anastase Makembera, about the old insignia. "It belonged to the Japanese," he told me. "They left it behind."

Why did they leave? I asked.

He shrugged. "They thought it was too dangerous to stay."

The Japanese had encountered several dangerous situations. A few years earlier, a Japanese aid group had been engaged in planting trees in the Farchana refugee camp, the first camp to open. According to one account, the Japanese enlisted the help of the refugees, some of whom apparently construed tree planting as a sign that the authorities intended to keep them permanently in the camps—no longer refugees but internees. Within the confines of the camp, this inference was quickly adopted as gospel. On July 13, 2004, an angry crowd gathered around the mystified Japanese aid workers and their saplings. Things got out of hand, and the Japanese fled, bruised and bloody, two injured seriously enough to be hospitalized.

Riots erupted throughout the Farchana camp. Three days later, the contagion spread to another camp, twenty-five kilometres south. In that camp, the cause was different—rumors that several aid workers were spies for the Sudanese government—but the effect was the same, and relief organizations were forced to withdraw their workers from both camps. Order was finally restored when Chadian armored vehicles entered the Farchana camp in search of the instigators. They left carrying the bodies of two refugees, one of them a woman. The circumstances of their deaths have never been explained.

The task of assisting some thirty-three million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people in more than a hundred and ten countries around the world costs the U.N.H.C.R. about $1.2 billion a year. The bulk of that sum comes from voluntary contributions made by wealthy nations. The top ten donors account for eighty-five per cent of the agency's budget. The United States is the largest contributor, followed by the European Commission, Japan, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

Managing this money, accounting to donors for its expenditure, and overseeing the agency's far-flung operations requires a bureaucracy. Like most bureaucracies, the one created by the U.N.H.C.R. has evolved into a cumbersome apparatus. The agency's job is to take care of refugees, a task that is full of uncertainty and peril. But it also has to raise money for its operations, supervise its staff, and report to its donors. In the perverse way of bureaucracies, these secondary tasks, less fraught with uncertainty and peril than refugee situations and thus seemingly more manageable, have assumed an importance equal to, and in some instances greater than, the job at hand. That, at least, is the conclusion of a lengthy analysis commissioned by the U.N.H.C.R. and published in 2005. According to the analysis, called "The State of U.N.H.C.R.'s Organization Culture," the agency "has a tendency to behave as though its primary purpose is, for example, to create reports, arrange staff movements and keep itself funded," rather than "protecting and assisting refugees."

IV. THE CAMP

The U.N.H.C.R.'s "Handbook for Emergencies" lays out general rules for how refugee camps should be set up—one tent per family of four to six people, set on a plot of land the approximate footprint of a small suburban ranch house, enough space for both the tent and a small garden. The family plots are grouped into "communities" of sixteen families, separated by footpaths or narrow lanes, and these, in turn, are grouped into "blocks" and, finally, into "sectors." Each sector, block, and community is identified by a number or a letter. In theory, every person in every refugee camp has a precise address.

I went to the Bredjing refugee camp, near the village of Hadjer Hadid, in the company of Comlan Spero, from Benin, who had been eighteen months in country. We travelled from the U.N.H.C.R. field office in Farchana in a convoy of four other Land Cruisers, a fifty-minute journey on a washboard road of rock and sand, ruts, furrows, and yawning potholes, a goat path of a road known for armed robberies and carjackings. In accordance with U.N. regulation, the convoy had an armed escort of Chadian gendarmes, their vehicle, fuel, salaries, and VHF radios paid for by the U.N.H.C.R.

At the entry of the Bredjing camp the gendarme emerged from a makeshift guardhouse, lifted the gate pole across the road, and waved the convoy past, into a vast panorama of tents and mud-brick habitations, rising and falling away into the distance with the undulations of the landscape. At last count, the Bredjing camp had 30,390 inhabitants, the most populous refugee camp in Chad, and twice the size the U.N.H.C.R. had originally intended. It dwarfed every Chadian town and village within eighty miles.

We drove down a broad road to the center of the camp. Smaller roads and footpaths branched off the main road and disappeared into the dense maze of dwellings. The tents, with their faded blue U.N.H.C.R. insignias, had become tawny-colored and mottled from being scoured by sand storms and baking in the sun. They were intended to last a year, perhaps two with care, but most of them had given shelter for three years and the fabric had started to split and tear apart. The refugees had defined their plots of land by erecting reed fences around the perimeters. Some fences were elaborate, the reeds tightly woven into a houndstooth pattern. Others were simpler, unwoven, the reeds merely piled between vertical sticks planted in the ground. A few were in disarray, on the verge of collapse, as if the inhabitants had taken ill or succumbed to despair.

The U.N.H.C.R. office stood in a

"I'm sorry. Mr. Broadbank seems to have stepped away from his desk."

barren clearing near the center of the camp. It was a small rectangular brick building with peeling white stucco and a corrugated metal roof. Its two rooms contained several straight-backed chairs, a narrow wooden bench, and a table with a delaminating plywood top. The walls were streaked with tobacco-colored stains from the rains. The grit of sand was underfoot and on every surface.

Spero convened a brief meeting with his Chadian workers. He oversaw the community-service programs in Bredjing and in two other refugee camps, an assignment that covered everything from the schooling of children to the care of the elderly and the infirm.

As the others set off on their rounds, I accompanied Spero to the nearby office of the Chadian government's refugee agency, which exercised extensive bureaucratic jurisdiction over the lives of the refugees. Camp registration, food-ration cards, travel permits, births, deaths, marriages, and separations all fell under its purview.

Outside the agency's office, in the scant shade of two gnarled acacia trees, a hundred or more women, many tending babies, sat on mats or on the bare ground. They wore robes of vibrant hues—emerald greens, crimson reds, lemon yellows. A long line of women, with a scattering of old men and teen-age boys, formed at the front door. Inside, the order of the line broke down and petitioners crammed in, bodies tight against one another, heads craned over shoulders. They were awaiting an audience with the Chadian officials.

Seeing Spero, one of the Chadians rose from his desk with a big smile. He was a short, lean, muscular man in his forties who was dressed in a dark-green suit and street shoes polished to a high gloss. On his wrist was a large gold watch. His name was Vito Ngomnalta. His understudy, a man fifteen years his junior, wore a T-shirt and sat at the second desk, a cigarette in his mouth, squinting as he riffled through a stack of several hundred blue ration cards.

Ngomnalta freed a chair next to the desk and invited me to sit down. Hundreds of pages of printed forms, some with passport-size photographs appended, lay stacked on the desk.

There were numerous births every month. Every birth had to be registered on the ration cards. Women in polygamous marriages were entitled to ask for a separation, a bureaucratic formality, so that they could have ration cards for their own children. Travel outside the camp required a permit. And then, at the end of the month, there was a registration check of everyone in the camp.

For every petitioner, Ngomnalta and his understudy searched through the stacks of paper or the piles of tattered blue ration cards. The women crowded into the room, babies at their breasts. Most were solemn. Others were dull and listless. Some were fierce-eyed, angry, and impatient, and made no effort to disguise their mood. It was like a D.M.V. in a land where people had no motor vehicles.

Every so often, in the interest of crowd control, Ngomnalta would rise from his desk, stomp around, and wave his arms. He appeared to have mastered the demeanor of a low-level bureaucrat. He was by turns haughty, authoritative, harsh, and dismissive.

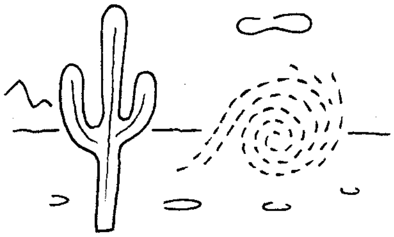
A teen-age boy, perhaps eighteen, wearing dusty jeans and a short-sleeved shirt, sat before Ngomnalta and proffered a tattered page. A travel permit, necessary for exiting and entering the camp, it was folded in half and then in quarters. The boy opened it delicately, like the wings of a butterfly. Examined by many hands at many checkpoints, it had split along the four creases.

Ngomnalta took it from the boy, gave it a glance, and spoke to him sharply. The document had expired twelve days ago.

The boy replied, a worried look in his eyes: yes, he knew that it had expired, and would like to have another.

Ngomnalta shook his head dismissively. From what I gathered, it was the boy's duty to make this application for renewal before the expiration of the permit. Whatever the problem, Ngomnalta slapped the document face down atop a thick stack of papers. Case closed.

The boy began to appeal, but Ngomnalta motioned him to be on his way and summoned the next person in line.



Throughout his audience, the boy had maintained a deferential bearing. But as he rose from the chair his eyes smoldered with anger. He glared openly at Ngomnalta, but Ngomnalta either did not notice or was immune to this sort of venom.

One day, in another refugee camp called Treguine, I sat outside with Spero in the shade of a thorn tree. Nearby was a crude brick schoolhouse from which came the sound of children's voices during their lessons.

Spero was explaining how the refugees managed to create an economy in the camps. Every camp has a market, with stalls in which goods of every sort—food, tools, cloth—are bought, sold, and traded. To make money, the refugees grow vegetables in their gardens, or collect wood, an everyday necessity for cooking that now required ever longer foraging trips into the countryside. Some hire themselves out to work in the Chadians' fields, and some work for the World Food Program unloading fifty-kilo sacks of grain. Others are more entrepreneurial. In many refugee camps, barbers have set up shops, cafés offer tea and fruit juices, and millers have machines to mill the wheat and other grains distributed by the World Food Program. In nearly every camp, there is at least one entertainment center, with a television hooked up to a satellite dish and powered by a small generator. On any given night, fifty or sixty people pay to watch the news and a movie in Arabic.

Spero had never seen an entertainment center in action. All U.N. personnel, and those of every other relief organization, must leave the refugee camps by four-thirty every afternoon. At night, the camps belong to the refugees.

Late one afternoon, I found myself in an empty U.N.H.C.R. office in one of the camps. Outside, the sky was a dome of blue and the sun beat down like a hammer. Everything crackled with dryness. The oils of my hands had evaporated, my fingers and palms were fissured and scaled with dead skin. To avoid the sun, I stood inside the doorway and watched people pass by in the shimmering heat.

An old woman appeared at the end of the porch and eyed me. Her robes

ANTEROOMS

Out of the snowdrift
Which covered it, this pillared
Sundial starts to lift,

Able now at last
To let its frozen hours
Melt into the past

In bright, ticking drops.
Time so often hastens by,
Time so often stops—

Still, it strains belief
How an instant can dilate,
Or long years be brief.

Dreams, which interweave
All our times and tenses, are
What we can believe:

Dark they are, yet plain,
Coming to us now as if
Through a cobwebbed pane

Where, before our eyes,
All the living and the dead
Meet without surprise.

—*Richard Wilbur*

of yellow and green were frayed and soiled. She had a stick for walking, gnarled and crooked, stripped of its bark. She said something to me—in Arabic, I presumed—and mounted with difficulty the single concrete step to the porch. I nodded to her and smiled, and she stumped toward me. In front of me, leaning on her stick, she asked me a question.

I shrugged and said, "I'm sorry, I do not speak Arabic."

She nodded sagely and began a long dissertation. Her face was deeply lined, her eyes rheumy, the sclera yellow. Her shawl had slipped back on her head, and I saw that her gray hair was arranged in neat rows of small tight braids. She extended a hand, the palm cupped.

Just then, a young man in long white robes and a white *immah*, a loose turban, saw us and came over to the porch. I nodded to him and asked if he could tell me what the woman was saying. I asked in French, having become habituated to speaking with Chadians, who are Francophone.

"I speak a little English," he said to me.

He told me that his name was Muhammad Yusef. Then he addressed himself to the woman. He spoke in a gentle voice, barely above a whisper.

The old woman was sagging against the doorframe. I said to the young man, "Let's go inside so she can sit."

The woman dropped heavily onto a bench and leaned forward on her stick. Muhammad Yusef sat in front of her, erect, on a straight-backed chair. His white robes were freshly ironed and impeccable. He was uncommonly handsome, his features clean and sharply etched. He listened to the old woman with respect and dignity.

"She is alone," he told me. "Her family have all died in the war. She has no one here to help her."

The woman lifted her hand and made another comment.

"Also, she would like a new tent."

There was nothing I could do for this woman, apart from giving her some money. In substance and in many details, her story was the story of almost everyone in this camp.

From my pocket I withdrew a handful of Chadian coins and placed them in the woman's hand. She put her hand to her chest and thanked me, levered herself up, and went out the door into the sun-baked terrain.

I sat inside the darkened room with Muhammad Yusef. I asked him how he had learned English. He attended an English class in the camp, he said, taught once a week by an elderly Darfurian man. The class was not sponsored by a humanitarian organization, and the teacher did not work for free. Each student had to pay him half a day's wages per class.

"Where do you get the money?" I asked.

He told me that he works whenever he can, usually in the fields. The harvest season had just ended. A day's labor yielded him about six hundred C.F.A.s, or about $1.30.

At the door of the room, another woman appeared, this one middle-aged and stout, wearing robes of red and yellow. She spoke to Muhammad Yusef, who again listened calmly and without interruption.

"She is also poor," he told me. "She has seven children. She does not have a husband. He died. She does not work, because she cannot leave the children alone."

"Where is she from?" I asked.

The woman spoke at length. "She is from a village near Misterei," Muhammad Yusef said. "When the *janjaweed* killed her husband, she came here. She has been here three years."

These were the salient facts, the bare particulars of her situation, shorn of details. The woman looked to be in her mid-forties. She held within her the memories of childhood and family, marriage and birth, violent death and flight. And, now, a life uprooted within a refugee camp. Tonight, she will cook for her children. Tomorrow, she or one of her daughters will stand in line to fetch water at the spigot closest to her block, and venture out of the camp in search of firewood. Even if we spoke the same language, I would never comprehend the demons she wrestled with as she tried to sleep at night.

I had no more coins. I pulled out a bill, a thousand C.F.A.s—a little more than a day's wages in the fields—and pressed it into her hand.

In her place was another woman. Behind her was yet another, and then a third. They had formed a line. I had become an unofficial bureau of appeal, a non-governmental organization of one. If I remained, the line would grow to twenty, thirty women, waiting in turn for an audience.

I stood and walked toward the next woman waiting at the door. She addressed Muhammad Yusef sharply, clearly protesting that she had not yet been heard. Her mouth was set and her eyes blazed with indignation. Muhammad Yusef tilted his head slightly, smiled, and replied to her in a soft voice. Despite his tone, I suspect that he was chastising her for her demeanor.

"No, I want to hear her," I told him.

The woman composed herself and began to speak. "Her son is ill," Muhammad Yusef said. "She takes him out every day to get air. The *janjaweed* shot him, and he has a bullet near his heart and cannot get up."

"How old is her son?"

Muhammad Yusef listened to the woman, nodding.

"Her son is twenty-two years old. The doctor told her that she must take him to Abéché, to the hospital, but she has not been able to."

I pulled some bills out of my pocket and handed her a C.F.A. note. I gave the next two women a bill apiece, and, stepping outside, saw an endless vista of tents.

V. THE BATTLE OVER THE HILL

The rebel army of a hundred vehicles that had entered the village of Hadjer Hadid on Saturday afternoon and disrupted the market had identified itself as the Union of Forces for Democracy and Development. Its leader, Mahamat Nouri, had once been President Déby's defense minister. His army was the largest and best equipped of the rebel groups.

At dawn the next morning, I was awakened by the shriek of two fighter planes, the French Mirages, passing low overhead. I went out to the courtyard and saw that Francis Béré was already in his office.

"The rebel column is on the move," he told me. It had left Hadjer Hadid and was on the main road to Abéché, having bivouacked at a tiny village called Abou Goulem, just six miles away.

The Mirages screamed above us again, banking off to the south. Béré and I stood outside watching them. "The French are doing reconnaissance for the Chadian government," he said. "Every move the rebels make is known to the Army."

The problem that preoccupied Béré now was evacuation. With a hundred heavily armed rebel vehicles occupying the main road to Abéché, we could not travel overland. "If we need to evacuate, we will have to do it in small planes, and they can carry only eight people," he said.

"Where do we evacuate to?" I asked. "Abéché?"

"Yes," he said.

"Maybe it will be Abéché that has to evacuate, not us," I said.

He laughed. "Maybe."

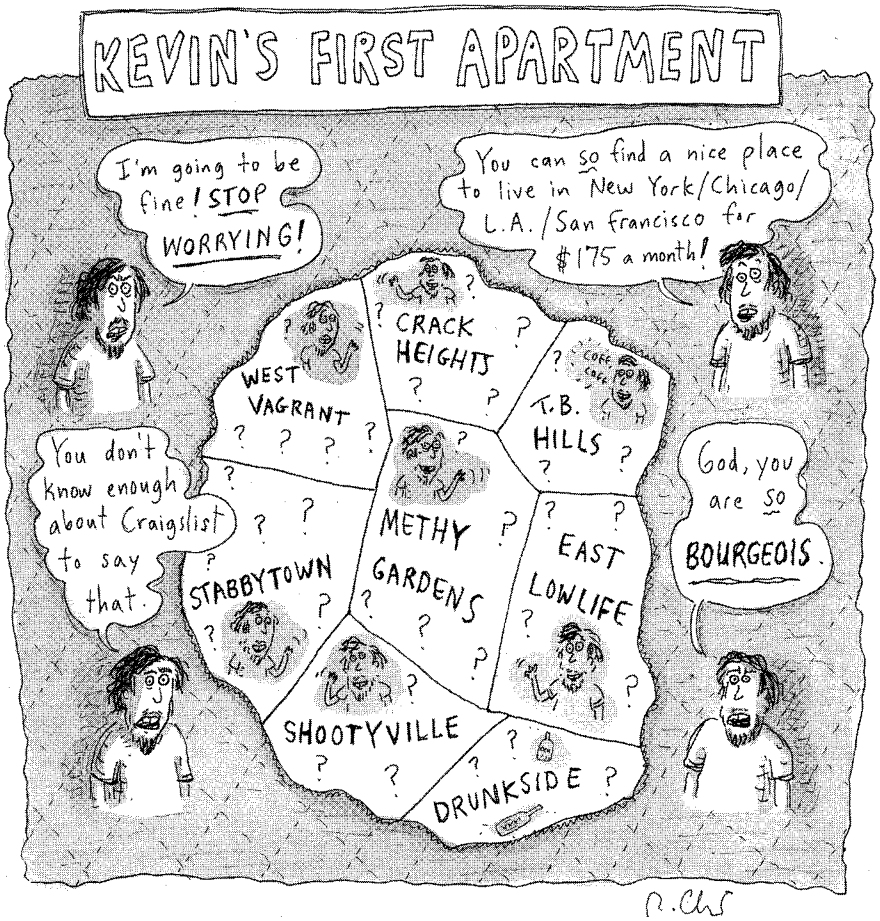
That evening, a column of Chadian Army vehicles moved out of Abéché toward the rebel army. Gervais Koutangni believed that there was little likelihood of a battle. He thought that the rebels would fade away into the countryside. Spero thought differently. He didn't say much, but his smile, when I greeted him, was tight and quick.

"If there is a battle, the problem for us will come afterward, in the chaos that will follow with retreat," he said.

The battle at Abou Goulem began on Monday morning at nine o'clock. The first salvo of big guns, six miles away, sounded like thunder in the distance. Outside the field-office gates, on the dusty street, the villagers who lived nearby stood motionless, gazing in the direction of Abou Goulem.

In his office, Koutangni was communicating with Abéché. He looked worried. "It's a dangerous situation," he said. "The fighting could arrive here."

The battle continued for three hours, until noon, and, finally, there was silence.


KEVIN'S FIRST APARTMENT
I'm going to be fine! STOP WORRYING!
You can so find a nice place to live in New York/Chicago/L.A./San Francisco for $175 a month!
You don't know enough about Craigslist to say that.
God, you are so BOURGEOIS.
WEST VAGRANT
CRACK HEIGHTS
T.B. HILLS
COFF COFF
METHY GARDENS
EAST LOWLIFE
STABBYTOWN
SHOOTYVILLE
DRUNKSIDE

I left the field office and walked a hundred yards up the road, to a small compound occupied by Doctors Without Borders. An Italian nurse and a Swedish doctor were preparing bandages, medicines, and cots for the wounded. They had heard that there were more than two hundred dead and wounded in the Chadian Army alone, and that the hospital in Abéché was overwhelmed with injured soldiers lying on cots in the corridors.

On the radio that evening, the rebels declared a decisive victory in the battle of Abou Goulem. That announcement was immediately followed by a government declaration that the Chadian Army had crushed the rebels.

Koutangni cancelled all trips to the refugee camps. It was too dangerous to travel. The gendarmes had, in any event, vanished, and there was no escort against the *coupeurs de route*. We were in lockdown until further notice.

The road to Abéché was strewn with the burned-out hulks of military vehicles. The Chadian Army had removed its own dead and wounded but had left the rebel dead to bake in the sun. Koutangni told me that the villagers of Abou Goulem had all fled into the bush when the rebels arrived. Now they were burying the dead rebels.

The days of lockdown passed one after another, and the rumors of war continued.

One afternoon, Aiméry Mbounkap appeared in Spero's office with the news that the Chadian Army had moved into position just behind the field office, beyond a small rise, and that it was preparing to attack a rebel contingent. "We are directly in the line of fire," he said.

"Where does this news come from?" I asked. "From good authority?"

"Yes. One of our drivers has an uncle in the Chadian Army, a colonel, who told him this."

Everybody had news, but all news was suspect. The rebel forces seemed half phantom; they were reported everywhere, lurking in the hills, columns coming from the west and the north. Mbounkap, who wanted to return to his wife and children, was furious that we had not yet been evacuated.

Not far to the north, another battle broke out. I stood in the courtyard of the field office and watched the flash of cannon, like dry lightning, in the distance. According to the U.N.H.C.R. office in Abéché, two rebel groups, normally antipathetic to each other, had joined forces.

A poisonous torpor of boredom and anxiety descended over everyone. I saw Spero in his office, slouched down so far that only his round head was visible above the plane of the desk, like a dark pumpkin on a table. He smiled at me weakly, a jack-o'-lantern with white teeth.

Across the street, in the World Food Program compound, I found Béré sitting alone, watching television. I got a beer and sat down with him. He had a pot of food in front of him, a stew of some kind, cooked yesterday or the day before. It smelled older. He offered me some. I declined. We lapsed into silence and watched an American sitcom in French.

After a while, Béré turned to me. "I am not happy today," he said sadly. "I miss my family. He looked down at his hands in his lap. "You get very lonely here."

He had sixteen months remaining in Chad before he could apply for another assignment. "The money is good, but the job is hard," he told me. And so he stayed on, hoping that his next post would be in Europe, perhaps in Rome, the location of the headquarters of the World Food Program.

After nine days of lockdown, movement to and from the refugee camps began again. The first week of every month was the period of food distribution in the camps, and that occupied Béré's attention. With the road to Abéché now clear, Koutangni departed to meet with Catherine Huck. Several days later, I set off for Abéché, too.

I rode with a U.N.H.C.R. driver in a Land Cruiser, behind an escort of Chadian gendarmes. We passed the village of Abou Goulem, the road scorched and blackened but cleared of debris. In the distance, across a barren plain, I saw the burned shells of several military vehicles. Most of the battle had taken place out there, the driver told me. Rebel corpses still lay in the sun.

I left Chad in mid-December of 2007. Around this time, armed bandits climbed over the wall of the U.N.H.C.R. field office in Guéréda, north of Farchana, and stole two Land Cruisers. Within three days, bandits had made off with five vehicles belonging to relief agencies. The U.N. staff in Guéréda was evacuated to Abéché. Six weeks after my departure, on January 31st, three hundred heavily armed rebel vehicles, moving swiftly across the country from the Sudanese border, arrived on the outskirts of N'Djamena. The rebel army, by then an alliance of three groups, encircled the Presidential Palace and demanded negotiations with President Idriss Déby. The battle began the next day. The U.N. evacuated all but a few of its personnel, as did other aid organizations. The U.S. Ambassador quit the country on a French military plane. Thirty thousand residents of the city fled across the Chari River to Cameroon. The U.N.H.C.R. dispatched an Emergency Response Team to Cameroon to assist the Chadian refugees.

After two days of fighting, the rebels failed to take the city and withdrew. The corpses of soldiers and civilians littered the streets, along with the wreckage of military vehicles. According to the Red Cross, there were more than a thousand wounded, most of them civilians. Looters pillaged shops and ransacked the offices of the U.N. and other aid organizations.

A week later, the *janjaweed* militia attacked and burned a dozen villages in West Darfur. Twelve thousand new refugees crossed the border into Chad.

In May, a Frenchman named Pascal Marlinge was travelling in a convoy of three vehicles on the Farchana road. He was forty-nine years old, the director of Save the Children U.K. in Chad. His convoy was stopped by three armed men. One of them shot him in the head, killing him. No one else was injured.

The rainy season began in June. For four months, the roads in eastern Chad were impassable. The armies retreated to their camps and prepared for the coming of the next season of war. The various rebel factions, each with its own loyalties, have no aim other than to seize power, and oil revenue, for themselves. Should one faction succeed in overthrowing President Déby, the others will fight for control, and the country will plunge into a brutal, uncontained civil war. ♦

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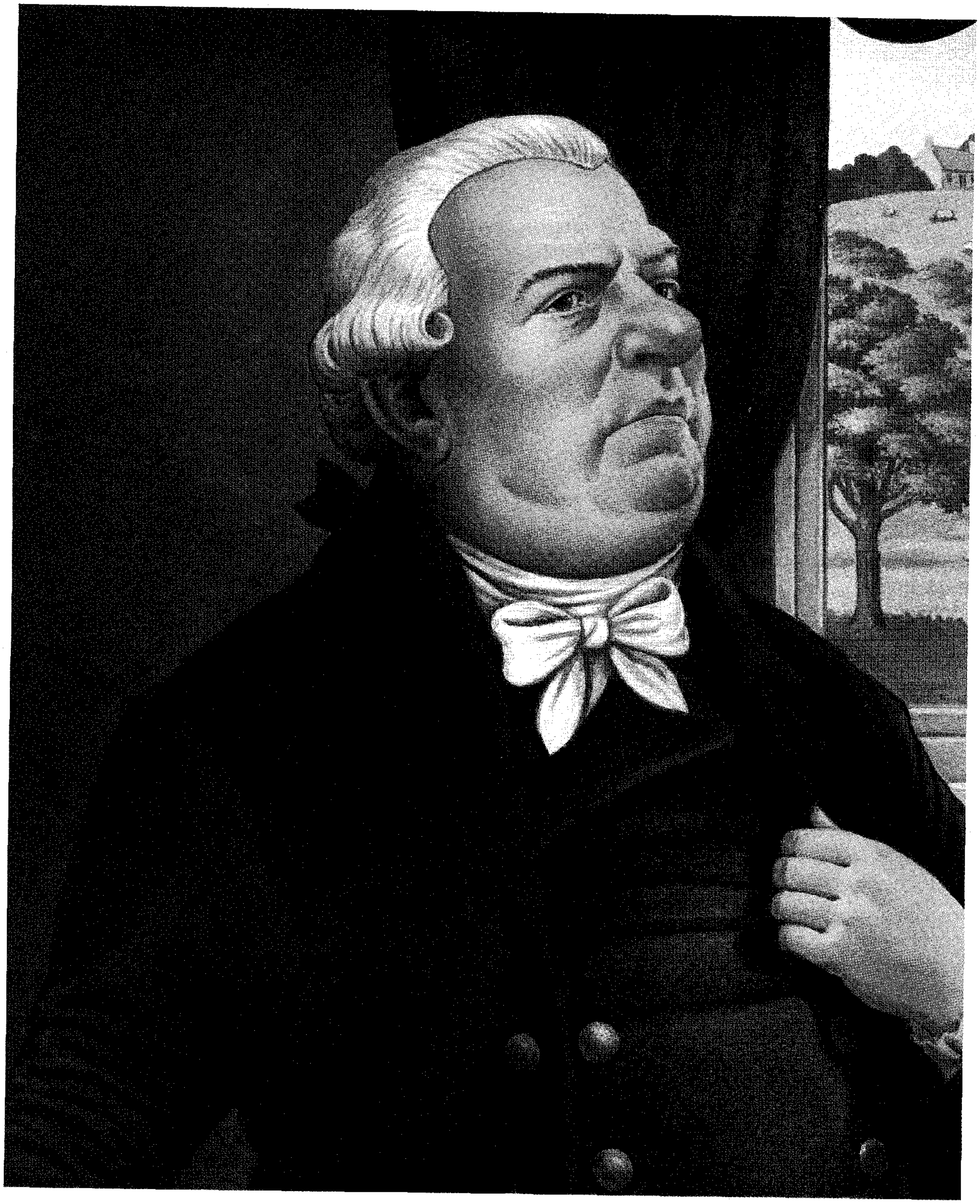
Photographs from Chad by Christoph Bangert.

FICTION

THE LIMNER

BY JULIAN BARNES



Mr. Tuttle had been argumentative from the beginning: about the fee—twelve dollars—the size of the canvas, and the prospect to be shown through the window. Fortunately, there had been swift accord about the pose and the costume. Over these, Wadsworth was happy to oblige the customs collector; happy also to give him the appearance, as far as it was within his skill, of a gentleman. That was, after all, his business. He was a limner but also an artisan, and paid at an artisan's rate to produce what suited the client. In thirty years, few would remember what the collector of customs had looked like; the only relic of his physical presence after he had met his Maker would be this portrait. And, in Wadsworth's experience, clients held it more important to be pictured as sober, God-fearing men and women than they did to be offered a true likeness. This was not a matter that perturbed him.

From the edge of his eye, Wadsworth became aware that his client had spoken, but he did not divert his gaze from the tip of his brush. Instead he pointed to the bound notebook in which so many sitters had written comments, expressed their praise and blame, wisdom and fatuity. He might as well have opened the book at any page and asked his client to select the appropriate remark left by a predecessor five or ten years before. The opinions of this customs collector so far had been as predictable as his waistcoat buttons, if less interesting. Fortunately, Wadsworth was paid to represent waistcoats, not opinions. Of course, it was more complicated than that: to represent the waistcoat, and the wig, and the breeches, *was* to represent an opinion—indeed, a whole corpus of them. The waistcoat and breeches showed the body beneath, as the wig and hat showed the brain beneath—though, in some cases, it was a pictorial exaggeration to suggest that any brains lay beneath.

He would be happy to leave this town, to pack his brushes and canvases, his pigments and palette, into the small cart, to saddle his mare, and then take the forest trails that, in three days, would lead him home. There he would rest, and reflect, and perhaps decide to live differently, without this constant travail of the itinerant. A peddler's life; also a supplicant's. As always, he had come to this town, taken lodgings by the night, and placed an advertisement in the newspaper, indicating his competence, his prices, and his availability. "If no application is made within six days," the advertisement ended, "Mr. Wadsworth will quit the town." He had already painted the small daughter of the drygoods salesman, and Deacon Zebediah Harries, who had given him Christian hospitality in his house, and recommended him to the collector of customs.

Mr. Tuttle had not offered lodging, but the limner willingly slept in the stable with his mare for company, and ate in the kitchen. And then there had been that incident on the third evening, against which he had failed—or felt unable—to protest. It had made him sleep uneasily. It had wounded him, too, if the truth were known. He ought to have written the collector down for an oaf and a bully—he had painted enough in his years—and forgotten the matter. Perhaps he should indeed consider his retirement, let his mare grow fat, and live from what crops he could grow and what farm stock he could raise. He could always paint windows and doors for a trade, instead of people; he would not judge this an indignity.

Late on the first morning, Wadsworth had been obliged to introduce the collector of customs to the notebook. The fellow, like many another, had imagined that merely opening his mouth wider might be enough to effect communication. Wadsworth had watched the pen travel across the page, and then the forefinger tap impatiently. "If God is merciful," the man had written, "perhaps in Heaven you will hear." In reply, he had half smiled, and given a brief nod, from which surprise and gratitude might be inferred. He had read the thought many times before. Often it was a true expression of Christian feeling and sympathetic hope; occasionally, it represented, as now, a scarcely concealed dismay that the world contained those with such frustrating defects. Mr. Tuttle was among the masters who preferred their servants to be mute, deaf, and blind—except when his convenience required the matter otherwise. Of course, masters and servants had become citizens and hired help once the juster republic had declared itself. But masters and servants did not die out; nor did the essential inclinations of man.

Wadsworth did not think that he was judging the collector in an un-Christian fashion. His opinion had been forged on first contact, and confirmed on that third evening. The incident had been the crueller in that it had involved a child, a garden boy who had scarcely entered the years of understanding. The limner always felt tenderly toward children: for themselves, for the grateful fact that they overlooked his defect, and also because he had no issue himself. He had never known the company of a wife. Perhaps he might yet do so, though he would have to insure that she was beyond childbearing years. He could not inflict his defect on others. Some had tried explaining that his fears were unfounded, since the affliction had arrived not at birth but after an attack of the spotted fever when he was a boy of five. Further, they pressed, had he not made his way in the world, and might not a son of his, howsoever constructed, do likewise? Perhaps that would be the case, but what of a daughter? The notion of a girl living as an outcast was too much for him. True, she might stay at home, and there would be a shared sympathy between them. But what would happen to such a child after his death?

No, he would go home and paint his mare. This had always been his intention, and perhaps now he would execute it. She had been his companion for twelve years, understood him easily, and took no heed of the noises that issued from his mouth when they were alone in the forest. His plan had been this: to paint her, on the same size of canvas used for Mr. Tuttle, though turned on its horizontal axis, and, afterward, to cast a blanket over the picture and uncover it only on the mare's death. It was presumptuous to compare the daily reality of God's living creation with a human simulacrum formed by an inadequate hand—even if this was the very purpose for which his clients employed him.

He did not expect it would be easy to paint the mare. She would lack the patience, and the vanity, to stand immobile for him, one hoof proudly advanced. But, then, neither would his mare have the vanity to come around and examine the canvas even as he worked on it. The collector of customs was now doing so, leaning over his shoulder, peering and pointing. There was something he did not approve. Wadsworth glanced upward, from the immobile face to the mobile one. Even though he had a distant memory of speaking and hearing, he had never learned the facility of reading words upon the tongue. Wadsworth raised the narrowest of his brushes

DAVID LAWRENCE

from the waistcoat button's boss and transferred his eye to the notebook as the collector dipped his pen. "More dignity," the man wrote, and then underlined the words.

Wadsworth felt that he had already given Mr. Tuttle dignity enough. He had increased his height, reduced his belly, ignored the hairy moles on the fellow's neck, and generally attempted to represent surliness as diligence, irascibility as moral principle. And now he wanted more of it! This was an un-Christian demand, and it would be an un-Christian act on Wadsworth's part to accede to it. It would do the man no service in God's eyes if the limner allowed him to appear puffed up with all the dignity he demanded.

A SENSIBLE LIFE

In the beginning
there was a meanness and it spread.

Perhaps I absorbed it, so that whatever I saw
was filtered through the meanness.

I don't mean "stingy," stinginess,
as do British novelists, by the way.

Although a lacking generosity—
the ability to will that there be

someone Other than Oneself was certainly
a kind of cause.

In the beginning, then,
it was willed that I not be.

This shamed me, however good
an act I learned to put on.

And now it is fifty years later.
I have a profound interest in freedom, I notice,

He had painted infants, children, men, and women, and even corpses. Three times he had urged his mare to a deathbed where he was asked to perform resuscitation—to represent as living someone he had just met as dead. If he could do that, surely he should be able to render the quickness of his mare as she shook her tail against the flies, or impatiently raised her neck while he prepared the little painting cart, or pricked her ears as he made noises to the forest.

At one time he had tried to make his meaning plain to his fellow-mortals by gesture and by sound. It was true that a few simple actions could be easily imitated: he could indicate, for example, how a client might wish to stand. But other gestures often resulted in humiliating games of guessing, while the sounds he was able to utter failed to establish either his requirements or his shared nature as a human being—part of the Almighty's work, if differently made. Women judged the noises he made embarrassing, children found them a source of amusement, men a proof of imbecility. He had tried to advance in this way, but had not succeeded, and so he had retreated into the muteness they expected, and perhaps preferred. It was at this point that he had purchased his calfskin logbook, in which all human statement and opinion recurred. *Do you think, sir, there will be painting in Heaven? Do you think, sir, there will be hearing in Heaven?*

But his understanding of men, such as it had developed, came less from what they wrote down, more from his mute observation. Men—and women, too—imagined that they could alter their voice and meaning without its showing in their face. In this they were much deceived. His own face, as he observed the human carnival, was as inexpressive as his tongue, but his eye told him more than they could guess. Formerly, he had carried, inside his logbook, a set of handwritten cards, bearing useful responses, necessary suggestions, and civil corrections to what was being proposed. He even had one special card, for when he was being condescended to by his interlocutor beyond what he found proper. It read, "Sir, the understanding does not cease to function when the portals of the mind are blocked." This was sometimes accepted as a just rebuke, sometimes held to be an impertinence from a mere artisan who slept in the stable. Wadsworth had abandoned its use, not because of either response but because it admitted too much knowledge. Those in the world of tongue held the advantage: they were his paymasters, they exercised authority, they entered society, they exchanged thoughts and opinions naturally. Though, for all this, Wadsworth did not see that speaking was in itself a promoter of virtue. His own advantages were only two: that he could represent on canvas those who spoke, and could silently perceive their meaning. It would have been foolish to give away this second advantage.

The business with the piano, for instance. Wadsworth had first inquired, by pointing to his fee scale, if the collector of customs wished for a portrait of the entire family, matching portraits of himself and his wife, or a joint portrait, with perhaps miniatures of the children. Mr. Tuttle, without looking at his wife, had pointed to his own breast and written on the fee sheet, "Myself alone." Then he had glanced at his wife, put one hand to his chin, and added, "Beside the piano." Wadsworth had noticed the handsome, claw-footed rosewood instrument, and asked with a gesture if he might go across to it. Whereupon he had demonstrated several poses: from sitting informally beside the open keyboard with a favorite song on display to standing more formally beside the instrument. Tuttle had taken Wadsworth's place, arranged himself, advanced one foot, and then, after consideration, closed the piano lid. Wadsworth deduced from this that only Mrs. Tuttle played the piano; further, that Tuttle's desire to include it was an indirect way of in-

and an urgent sense of little time.
Little time. Near Little Gidding.

I ween ken reckon have on
the British women novelists I have loved.

I have to mean their novels, of course.
“Queen of the Tambourine.” “The Vacillations of Poppy Carew.”

“Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit.”
Behold, how the outcast makes good.

“Time” is a word. “Love” is a word.
Between them are words and between them

an entrance. I pray to be
entranced, starting right now again I do.

I am old enough to understand
being willing

to go on is a great gift.

—*Liz Waldner*

cluding her in the portrait. Indirect, and also less expensive.

The limner had shown the customs collector some miniatures of children, hoping to change his mind, but Tuttle merely shook his head. Wadsworth was disappointed, partly for reasons of money but more because his delight in painting children had increased as that in painting their progenitors had declined. Children were more mobile than adults, more deliquescent of shape, it was true. But they also looked him in the eye, and when you were deaf you heard with your eyes. Children held his gaze, and he thereby perceived their nature. Adults often looked away, whether from modesty or a desire for concealment, while some, like the collector, held his gaze challengingly, with a false honesty, as if to say, Yes, of course my eyes are concealing things, but you lack the discernment to realize it. Such clients judged Wadsworth’s affinity with children proof that he was as deficient in understanding as the children were. Whereas Wadsworth believed children’s affinity with him proof that they saw as clearly as he did.

When he had first taken up his trade, he had carried his brushes and pigments on his back, and walked the forest trails like a peddler. He found himself on his own, reliant upon recommendation and advertisement. But he was industrious and, being possessed of a companionable nature, grateful that his skill allowed him access to the lives of others. He would enter a household, and, whether placed in the stable, quartered with the help, or, very occasionally, and only in the most Christian of dwellings, treated like a guest, he had, for those few days, a function and a recognition. This did not mean that he was treated with any less condescension than other artisans, but at least he was being judged a normal human being; that is to say, one who merited condescension. He was happy, perhaps for the first time in his life.

And then, without any help beyond his own perceptions, he began to understand that he had more than just a function; he had strength of his own. This was not something that those who employed him would admit, but his eyes told him that it was the case. Slowly, he realized the truth of his craft: that the client was the master, except when he, James Wadsworth, was the client’s master. For a start, he was the client’s master when his eye discerned what the client would prefer him not to know. A husband’s contempt. A wife’s dissatisfaction. A deacon’s hypocrisy. A child’s suffering. A man’s pleasure at having his wife’s money to spend. A husband’s eye for the hired girl. Large matters in small kingdoms.

And, beyond this, he realized that when he rose in the stable and brushed the horsehair from his clothes, then crossed to the house and took up a brush made from the hair of another animal, he became more than he was taken for. Those who sat for him and paid him did not truly know what their money would buy. They knew what they had agreed on—the size of the canvas, the pose and the decorative elements (the bowl of strawberries, the bird on a string, the piano, the view from the window)—and from this agreement they inferred mastery. But this was the very moment at which mastery passed to the other side of the canvas. Hitherto in their lives they had seen themselves in looking glasses and hand mirrors, in the backs of spoons, and, dimly, in clear still water. It was even said that lovers were able to see their reflections in each other’s eyes, but the limner had no experience of this. Yet all such images depended upon the person in front of the glass, the spoon, the water, the eye. When Wadsworth provided his clients with their portraits, it was habitually the first time that they had seen themselves as someone else saw them. Sometimes, when the picture was presented, the limner would detect a sudden chill passing over the subject’s skin, as if he were thinking, So this is how I truly am? It was a moment of unaccountable seriousness: this image was how he would be remembered when he was dead. And there was a seriousness beyond even this. Wadsworth did not think himself presumptuous when his eye told him that often the subject’s next reflection was “And is this perhaps how the Almighty sees me, too?”

Those who did not have the modesty to be struck by such doubts tended to comport themselves as the collector now did: to ask for adjustments and improvements, to tell the limner that his hand and eye were faulty. Would they have the vanity to complain to God in His turn? “More dignity, more dignity.” An instruction all the more repugnant given Mr. Tuttle’s behavior in the kitchen two nights ago.

Wadsworth had been taking his supper, content with his day’s labor. He had just finished the piano. The instrument's narrow leg, which ran parallel to Tuttle's more massive limb, ended in a gilt claw, which Wadsworth had had some trouble representing. But now he was able to refresh himself, to stretch by the fire, to feed, and to observe the society of the help. There were more of these than expected. A collector of customs might earn fifteen dollars a week, enough to keep a hired girl. Yet Tuttle also kept a cook and a boy to work the garden. Since the collector did not appear to be a man lavish with his own money, Wadsworth deduced that it was Mrs. Tuttle's portion that permitted such luxury of attention.

Once they became accustomed to his defect, the help treated him easily, as if his deafness rendered him their equal. It was an equality that Wadsworth was happy to concede. The garden boy, an elf with eyes of burnt umber, had taken to entertaining him with tricks. It was as if he imagined that the limner, being shorn of words, thereby lacked amusement. This was not the case, but Wadsworth indulged this indulgence of him and smiled as the boy turned cartwheels, stole up behind the cook while she bent to the bake oven, or played a guessing game with acorns hidden in his fists.

The limner had finished his broth and was warming himself before the fire—an element that Mr. Tuttle was not generous with elsewhere in the house—when an idea came to him. He drew a charred stick from the edge of the ashes, touched the garden boy on the shoulder to make him stay as he was, then pulled a drawing book from his pocket. The cook and the hired girl tried to watch what he was doing, but he held them away with a hand, as if to say that this particular trick, one he was offering in thanks for the boy's own tricks, would not work if observed. It was a rough sketch—it could only be so, given the crudeness of the instrument—but it contained some part of a likeness. He tore the page from the book and handed it to the boy. The child looked up at him, with astonishment and gratitude, placed the sketch on the table, took Wadsworth's drawing hand, and kissed it. I should always paint children, the limner thought, looking the boy in the eye.

He was almost unaware of the laughing tumult that broke out when the other two examined the drawing, and then of the silence that fell when the collector of customs, drawn by the sudden noise, entered the kitchen.

The limner watched as Tuttle stood there, one foot advanced, as in his portrait, his mouth opening and closing in a manner that did not suggest dignity. He watched as the cook and the girl rearranged themselves in more decorous attitudes. He watched as the boy, alert to his master's gaze, picked up the drawing and modestly, proudly, handed it over. He watched as Tuttle took the paper calmly, examined it, looked at the boy, glanced at Wadsworth, nodded, then deliberately tore the sketch in four, placed it in the fire, waited until it blazed, said something further when in quarter-profile to the limner, and made his exit. He watched as the boy wept.

The portrait was finished: both rosewood piano and collector of customs gleamed. A small white customs house filled the window at Mr. Tuttle's elbow—not that there was any real window there, or, if there had been, any customs house visible through it. Yet everyone understood this modest transcendence of reality. And perhaps the collector, in his own mind, was only asking for a similar transcendence of reality when he demanded more dignity. He was still leaning over Wadsworth, gesturing at the representation of his face, chest, leg. It did not matter in the least that the limner could not hear what he was saying. He knew exactly what was meant, and also how little it signified. Indeed, it was an advantage not to hear, for the particularities would doubtless have raised him to an even greater anger than that which he presently felt.

He reached for his notebook. "Sir," he wrote, "We agreed upon five days for my labor. I must leave tomorrow morning by daybreak. We agreed that you would pay me tonight. Pay me, give me three candles, and by the morning I shall work such improvement as you require."

It was rare for him to treat a client with so little deference. It would be bad for his reputation in the county, but he no longer cared. He offered the pen in the direction of Mr. Tuttle, who did not deign to receive

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A FOODIE

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it. Instead, he left the room. While waiting, the limner examined his work. It was well done: the proportions were pleasing, the colors harmonious, and the likeness within the bounds of honesty. The collector ought to be satisfied, posterity impressed, and his Maker—always assuming he was vouchsafed Heaven—not too rebuking.

Tuttle returned and handed over six dollars—half the fee—and two candles. Doubtless the cost of them would be deducted from the second half of the fee when it came to be paid. If it came to be paid. Wadsworth looked long at the portrait, which, over the last days, had come to assume for him equal reality with its fleshly subject, and then he made several decisions.

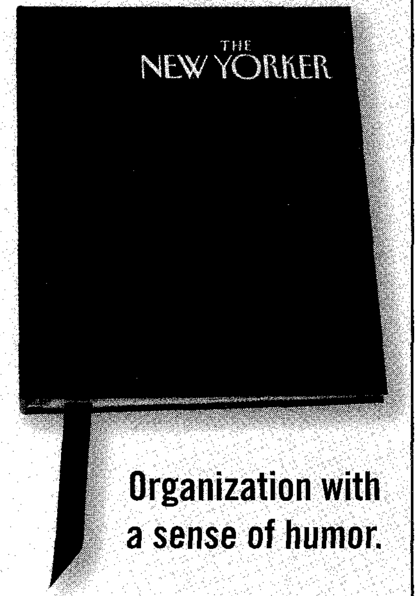
He took his supper as usual in the kitchen. His companions had been subdued these last two nights. He did not think they blamed him for the incident with the garden boy; at most, they thought his presence had led to their own misjudgment, and so they were chastened. This, at any rate, was how Wadsworth saw matters, and he did not think that their meaning would be clearer if he could hear speech or read lips; indeed, perhaps the opposite. If his notebook of men's thoughts and observations was anything to judge by, the world's knowledge of itself, when spoken and written down, did not amount to much.

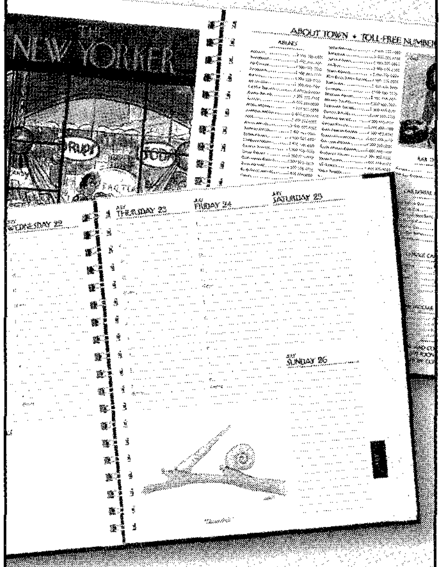
This time, he selected a piece of charcoal more carefully and, with his pocketknife, scraped its end to a semblance of sharpness. Then, as the boy sat opposite him, immobile more through apprehension than through a sitter's sense of duty, the limner drew him again. When he had finished, he tore out the sheet and, with the boy's eyes upon him, folded it, mimed the act of concealing it beneath his shirt, and handed it across the table. The boy immediately did as he had seen, and smiled for the first time that evening. Then, sharpening his piece of charcoal before each task, Wadsworth drew the cook and the hired girl. Each took the folded sheet and concealed it without looking. Then he rose, shook their hands, embraced the garden boy, and returned to his night's work.

"More dignity," he repeated to himself as he lit the candles and took up his brush. Well, then, a dignified man is one whose appearance implies a lifetime of thought, one whose brow expresses it. Yes, there was an improvement to be made there. He measured the distance between the eyebrow and the hairline, and at the midpoint, in line with the right eyeball, he developed the brow: an enlargement, a small mound, almost as if something were beginning to grow. Then he did the same above the left eye. Yes, that was better. But dignity was also to be inferred from the state of a man's chin. Not that there was anything patently insufficient about Tuttle's jawline. But perhaps the discernible beginnings of a beard might help—a few touches on each point of the chin. Nothing to cause immediate remark, let alone offense, merely an indication.

And perhaps another indication was required. He followed the collector's sturdily dignified leg down its stockinged calf to the buckled shoe. Then he followed the parallel leg of the piano down from the closed keyboard lid to the gilt claw that had so delayed him. Perhaps that trouble could have been avoided? The collector had not specified that the piano be rendered exactly. If a little transcendence had been applied to the window and the customs house, why not to the piano as well? The more so since the spectacle of a claw beside a customs man might suggest a grasping and rapacious nature, which no client would wish implied, whether there was evidence for it or not. Wadsworth therefore painted out the feline paw and replaced it with a quieter hoof, gray in color and lightly bifurcated.

Habit and prudence urged him to snuff out the two candles he had been awarded, but the limner decided to leave them burning. They were his now—or, at least, he would have paid for them soon. He washed his brushes in the kitchen, packed his painting box, saddled his mare, and harnessed the little cart to her. She seemed as happy to leave as he. As they walked from the stable, he saw windows outlined by candlelight. He hauled himself into the saddle, the mare moved beneath him, and he began to feel cold air on his face. At daybreak, an hour from now, his penultimate portrait would be examined by the hired girl pinching out the wasteful candles. He hoped that there would be painting in Heaven, but more than this he hoped that there would be deafness in Heaven. The mare, soon to be the subject of his final portrait, found her own way to the trail. After a while, with Mr. Tuttle's house far behind them, Wadsworth shouted into the silence of the forest. ◆





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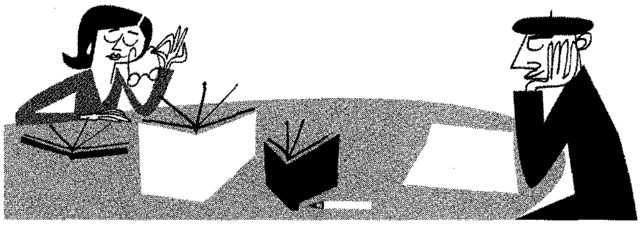


BOOKS

DOING IT

A new edition of "The Joy of Sex."

BY ARIEL LEVY

In 1961, the British scientist and physician Alex Comfort wrote a novel (his fifth) called "Come Out to Play," in which his alter ego, Dr. George Goggins, opens a clinic with his girlfriend to teach patients advanced sexual techniques. There he develops a compound called 3-blindmycin, which has the power to turn people on: "not raise the libido," Comfort later told a journalist, "but thaw the superego, the part of the mind that says 'mustn't.' " In a climactic scene, an explosion releases a cloud of 3-blindmycin over Buckingham Palace, leaving throngs of uninhibited Englishmen in its wake. Years afterward, Comfort said he'd always hoped that Peter Sellers would play him if the book were made into a film; for his leading lady, he pictured Sophia Loren.

Hollywood seems not to have been interested in the story. But if someone were to make a bio-pic of Comfort's own life it might well feature a scene intercutting that aphrodisiacal cloud with images from Comfort's most famous book, the 1972 best-seller "The Joy of Sex." That, too, was a kind of explosion, intended to unleash its readers' sexual potential by counteracting their ignorance and shame. "The Joy of Sex," which has sold more than twelve million copies worldwide, was an "unanxious account of the full repertoire of human heterosexuality," according to its author. It was the English answer to Japanese pillow books, illustrated texts designed to show couples where to put what, and was further enhanced by helpful advice: for instance, "Never, never refer to pillow-talk in anger later on ('I always knew you were a lesbian,' etc.)."

With its discreet cover and its content divided into Starters, Main Courses, and Sauces & Pickles, the book was loosely modelled on "Joy of Cooking," the culinary how-to book that had transformed the way its readers thought about food. Comfort wanted to do the same thing with making love—help people gain a sense of proficiency with the subject matter, and ultimately render them capable of "Cordon Bleu sex." But people had never been ashamed to cook. "The Joy of Sex" was something new. Unbridled eroticism "could well be the major contribution of the Aquarian revolution to human happiness," Comfort wrote. He cautioned that people who failed to come to terms with an aggressive sexuality were "apt to end up at My Lai or Belsen."

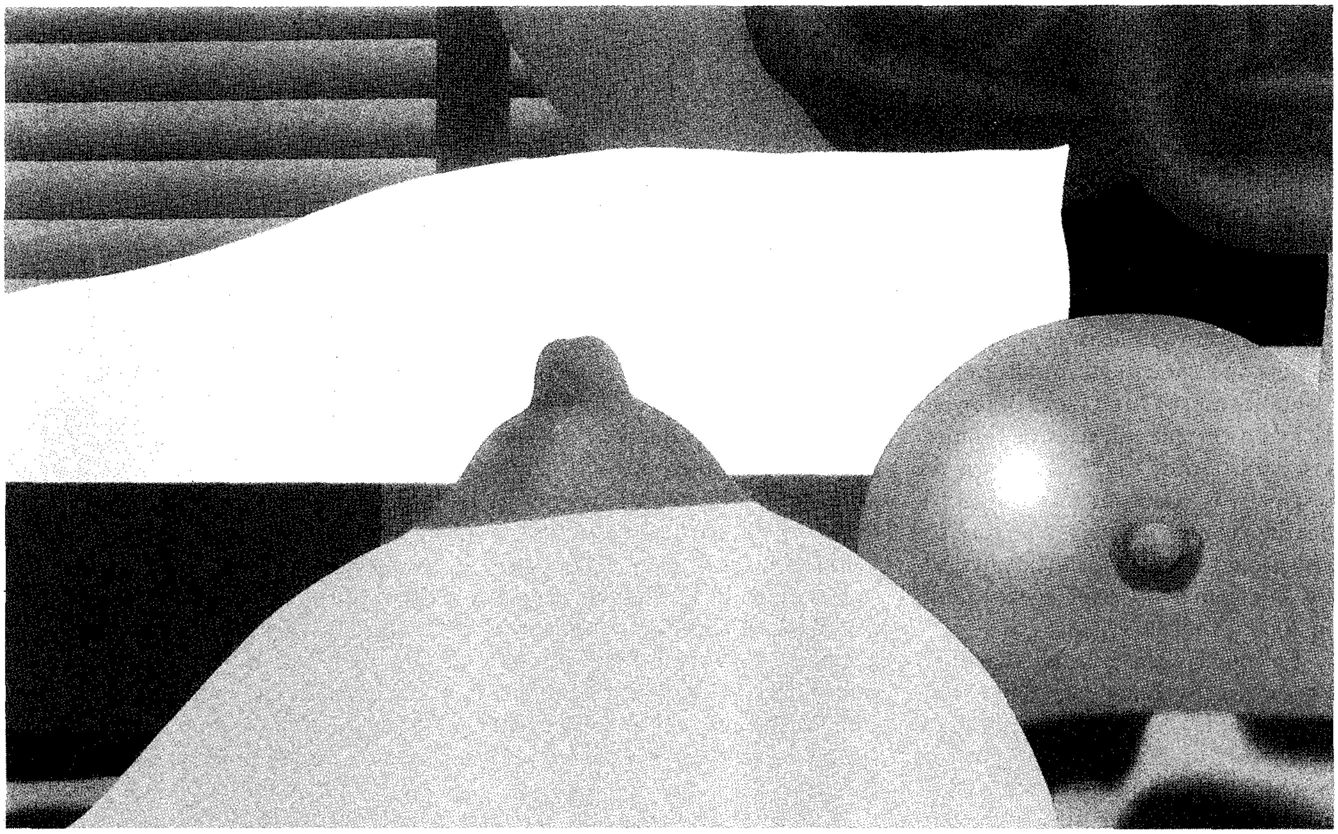
Comfort's fellow-Britons were already familiar with his immoderate style of self-expression and his utopian thinking when "The Joy of Sex" appeared. Comfort often aired his "anarcho-pacifist" views on the BBC, and he had published several political polemics, in addition to his novels, books of poetry, and what was at the time the preëminent textbook on gerontology. Comfort was brilliant and multitalented, but there was a certain pat, self-satisfied idealism to much of his nonscientific work. In 1941, George Orwell wrote an eviscerating review of Comfort's novel "No Such Liberty," deploring "the argument which is implied all the way through, and sometimes explicitly stated, that there is next to no difference between Britain and Germany, political persecution is as bad in one as in the other, those who fight against the Nazis always go Nazi themselves." Orwell noted, "If I treat Mr. Comfort's novel as a tract, I am only doing what he himself has done already."

Comfort had a tendency to focus single-mindedly on a given notion or project at the expense of any kind of balance: while he was a student at Highgate School, in London, he became convinced that he could concoct a superior version of gunpowder. He blew off much of his left hand. By the time he was finished with his experiments, his thumb was the only remaining digit. Later in his life, when he was practicing medicine, he said that he found this claw he'd created "very useful for performing uterine inversions." After he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, his enthusiasms led him to accumulate six degrees, including a doctorate in biochemistry.

Comfort turned his attention to sexual liberation with a similar zeal. He offered readers a creation myth for "The Joy of Sex" on the first page, claiming that the book was based on a manuscript that an anonymous and particularly sexually advanced couple had presented to him in his capacity as a biologist. "I have done little to the original draft apart from expansion to cover more topics," Comfort wrote. "The authors' choice of emphases and their light-hearted style have been left alone." In fact, both the choice of emphases and the lighthearted style were Comfort's; he wrote every word of "The Joy of Sex," though his credit on the book says "edited by." Comfort later claimed that he had made up this randy authorial couple because in England at the time it was frowned upon for physicians to write mass-market books, "an implementation of the principle that doctors don't advertise—of which I thoroughly approve, by the way," he remarked to a journalist in 1974. But it was also probably a subterfuge, to protect the feelings of his wife of thirty years, Ruth Harris. For more than a decade, Comfort had been sleeping with Ruth's best friend, Jane Henderson.

ABOVE: LENE DUE-JENSEN; OPPOSITE: TOM WESSELMANN, "BEDROOM PAINTING NO. 6" (1968)/ESTATE OF TOM WESSELMANN/LICENSED BY VAGA NYC

(Comfort met both women at Cambridge.) Comfort and Henderson took dozens of Polaroids of their erotic experiments, which they gave to the publisher Mitchell Beazley along with Comfort's manuscript—originally titled "Doing Sex Properly." The artists Charles Raymond and Christopher Foss were charged with transforming those photographs into pencil drawings, although the couple they depicted looked nothing like Comfort and Henderson.



If you are a child of the seventies and were raised on "The Joy of Sex," you are not likely to have forgotten the illustrations. The woman depicted in these drawings is lovely, and, even nearly forty years later, quite chic. Her gentleman friend, however, looks like a werewolf with a hangover. He is heavily bearded; his hair is long, and, it always seemed, a little greasy. His eyelids are usually at half-mast, adding to his feral appearance. In some of the pictures, you can practically smell him. (The smell is unpleasant.)

It isn't easy watching beauty get pawed by the beast, and our narrator does not help matters. "At a certain level and for all men," Comfort informs us, "girls, and parts of girls, are at this stimulus level unpeople." In "The Joy of Sex," a male is a man, a female is a girl, and a vagina is, to "males generally, slightly scarey: it looks like a castrating wound and bleeds regularly, it swallows the penis and regurgitates it limp, it can probably bite and so on." Men can get past such fears, of what Freudians called the vagina dentata, but Comfort cautions that "they are the origins of most male hangups including homosexuality." The penis, by contrast, "has more symbolic importance than any other human organ." Lest there be any confusion: "Vibrators are no substitute for a penis." Comfort even enlists his fictional female narrator to argue the point for him. Under the heading "Women (by her for him)," Comfort writes of male genitalia, "It's less the size than the personality, unpredictable movements, and moods which make up the turn-on (which is why rubber dummies are so sickening)." At times, "The Joy of Sex" has the feel of a penis propaganda pamphlet.

There was not a lot of feminist outcry about the book when it was published, probably because in 1972 there was so much else for feminists to cry about. There was, however, a feminist alternative: the Boston Women's Health Book Collective's "Our Bodies, Ourselves." The book announced on its original, 1971 jacket that it was "By and for Women," and with its democratic inclusion of numerous voices it had the vibe of a consciousness-raising group. (In fact, it was the product of one.) "Our Bodies, Ourselves" covered much of the same material as "The Joy of Sex," just with a different tone. It, too, had illustrations of a hirsute couple having intercourse in a series of positions. Both books said that everybody was bisexual, that sex should be a mutually satisfying, full-body experience, and that the communication of turn-ons could be of great benefit to this enterprise. And both books espoused the (distinctly seventies) notion that sex could be a value-neutral experience, as natural as eating, which undermined the traditional belief that sex ought to be in the service of procreation within the bounds of matrimony. "Our Bodies, Ourselves" added information on health, nutrition, self-defense, childbearing, and a rather more involved section on lesbianism. ("The Joy of Sex" has a drawing of two naked ladies kissing under the heading "Bisexuality," while "Our Bodies, Ourselves" includes a chapter entitled "In Amerika They Call Us Dykes.") If "The Joy of Sex" was like "Joy of Cooking"—though in some ways it was closer to Julia Child's "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," what with its strong authorial voice and affection for elaborate undertakings, to which Comfort assigned French names like *pattes d'araignée, cuissade*, and *feuille de rose*—"Our Bodies, Ourselves" was like the "Moosewood Cookbook." Everything in it was healthful, enlightened, nourishing.

Here's a trick you might try at home sometime: pick almost any recipe in the "Moosewood." Now add bacon. You will find that the addition of this decidedly unwholesome ingredient makes the food taste much better. "Our Bodies, Ourselves," likewise, lacked a certain trayf allure. The revised edition of the book—even the original—is a fantastic resource for educating young women (and very sophisticated girls) about their physicality. But as an erotic reference for adults in 2008 it's a little vegan.

Of course, there are endless alternatives now. If you are young and sassy, for example, you might enjoy "Sex: How to Do Everything," by two women who call themselves Em & Lo and have a penchant for frisky wordplay. A character in John Updike's "The Witches of Eastwick" thinks that "marriage is like two people locked up with one lesson to read, over and over, until the words become madness." If this rings true to you, you might be interested in "The Best-Ever Sex Handbook: Successful Techniques and New Ideas for Long-Term Lovers." If you are Wiccan, there's "Wicked Voodoo Sex," in which the author, Kathleen Charlotte, promises to help you reclaim your "wanga."

But none of those books have been huge best-sellers or cultural touchstones in the way that "The Joy of Sex" and "Our Bodies, Ourselves" were. Partly, this is because "Joy" and "Our Bodies" were a part of a movement that radically reformed the way the English-speaking world conceives of sexuality. At this point, only on Opposite Day is sex underpublicized in America. And there is also the matter of the World Wide Web. As the puppets in the Broadway musical "Avenue Q" sing, "The Internet is for porn." Of course, the Internet is for everything, but it's particularly good for quick answers: When was the Ming period? How do you prepare a truly fluffy frittata? And what is "The Flying Camel"?

Into the mobbed marketplace of how-to books and limitless Googling, Crown is releasing a new edition of "The Joy of Sex" ($29.95). Comfort himself revised his book several times; now Susan Quilliam, a British "relationship psychologist and agony aunt" (as her Web site describes her), has endeavored to modernize the text for a new, post-feminist era. Gone are some of the most outrageous Comfortisms, such as "Don't get yourself raped," or his dubious assessment of the rhythm method—"It may well account for the slightly higher incidence of abnormal babies among Catholic users through stale eggs getting fertilized." Deodorant is no longer "banned absolutely," as it was by Comfort, and armpit shaving is not referred to as "ignorant vandalism." Finally, and crucially, rear-entry intercourse is no longer called sex "à la Négresse."

Quilliam has succeeded in bringing "The Joy of Sex" up to current standards. Instead of opening with a crack about "one-legged ladies," as Comfort did, Quilliam adds a well-written section on special considerations for disabled readers, which is sensitive without being condescending. The book is still emphatically straight, but Quilliam has given it a gay-positive tone, in sharp contrast to Comfort's advice that if you might be that way inclined it was better not to experiment too much with a partner of the same sex, lest you let the gay genie out of the bottle. The original drawings have been replaced, with a mixture of modest photographs and impressionistic sketches. The hairiness has been eliminated, and the attractiveness gap between the man and the woman has been bridged. But the people in these pictures do not look as if they were in any kind of sexual ecstasy. Rather, they have the smug smiles of a couple whose 401(k)s have just appreciated. They look as if they were in a Viagra commercial, which is to say that they look like two people who have never, ever had sex.

Once you remove those memorable drawings and Comfort's batty, phallocentric prose, what you are left with is something that bears little resemblance to the subversive, explosive original. "The Joy of Sex" redux becomes generic—*Cook's Illustrated* with boobies. What was revolutionary in 1972 seems obvious now, and to present the material otherwise feels silly and square. It is difficult, for example, to take seriously the claim made by the new "Joy" that anal sex is "one of the last taboos," when it was listed as fair game in Comfort's text nearly forty years ago—and appears in both the Kamasutra (of the third century) and the Chinese "Rou Pu Tuan," from the Ming period (1368-1644; I Googled it). Quilliam hews to Comfort's basic premise that too much weirdness in sex is just as bad as too little, and the new edition retains Comfort's assertion that "exclusive obsessions in sex are very like living exclusively on horseradish sauce through allergy to beef; fear of horseradish sauce, however, as indigestible, unnecessary, and immature, is another hangup, namely puritanism." But, if procreation is no longer the goal of sex, why is one erotic practice more nutritious than the next? Who gets to decide what is horseradish and what is beef?

One is reminded of a line in Comfort's poem "Notes for My Son," in which he says, "Remember when you hear them beginning to say Freedom / Look carefully—see who it is." Comfort's freethinking did not extend beyond the boundaries of his own inclinations, and he said as much in his text. "We have tried to stay wide open, but it is always difficult to write about things one doesn't enjoy, and we have left out long discussion of the very specialized sexual attitudes . . . which aren't really love or even sex in quite our sense of the word."

Comfort and his wife, Ruth, divorced shortly after "Joy" came out: the unpleasantness of his infidelity seems to have been heightened for

Mrs. Comfort when her husband became internationally known as "Dr. Sex." In 1973, a few months later, Comfort married his mistress and muse, Jane, and the two moved to Santa Barbara so that Comfort could assume a post at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, a liberal think tank. The move also gave them closer proximity to the Sandstone, a clothing-optional community of utopian swingers in Topanga Canyon, which was reportedly visited by Timothy Leary, Sammy Davis, Jr., Betty Dodson, and the porn star Marilyn Chambers, and which Comfort and Jane had frequented since 1970. "Often the nude biologist Dr. Alex Comfort, brandishing a cigar, traipsed through the room between the prone bodies with the professional air of a lepidopterist strolling through the fields waving a butterfly net," Gay Talese wrote in "Thy Neighbor's Wife."

But Jane, according to a friend who was interviewed by the journalist Pagan Kennedy, eventually tired of group sex and open marriage. (Sexual fads may come and go, but jealousy is forever.) At the same time, Comfort's relationship with the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions soured, and he became involved in lawsuits with the center over breach of contract. In 1985, Comfort and Henderson returned to England, where he lived the rest of his life, more or less monogamously, in Kent.

Comfort suffered a massive brain hemorrhage in 1991, at the age of seventy-one, and Jane died shortly thereafter. From then until Comfort's death, in 2000, his son from his first marriage, Nicholas, was Comfort's caretaker and took over the business of managing "The Joy of Sex." "He was good about talking about sex in the abstract, but when he had to tell me about the facts of life he was embarrassed," Nicholas Comfort told a reporter on the occasion of the book's thirtieth anniversary. "He got it all over with quite quickly and hoped I wouldn't ask any questions." ♦

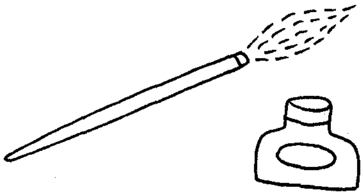
NEWYORKER.COM

Audio: A conversation with Ariel Levy.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Eating the Sun, *by Oliver Morton (Harper; $28.95).* Photosynthesis doesn't sound sexy, but Morton, a science journalist and the author of the book "Mapping Mars," has produced an account of it that fuses science with the history of science to convey its enormous, if nearly invisible, grandeur. Beginning with a painstaking explanation of how rubisco, probably the earth's most common protein, "knits" carbon dioxide into the living tissues of vegetation, the book ranges widely. Its final section takes the reader from the eighteenth-century dissenting preacher and scientific tinkerer Joseph Priestley's first inkling of the different gases making up the air to the vastly increased carbon emissions of today, and is particularly worthwhile. Morton shows how the content of "air" is the basis for everything we take for granted, and provides both a sense of awe and an extremely useful way to think about global energy concerns and the climate crisis.

Shakespeare and Modern Culture, *by Marjorie Garber (Pantheon; $30).* Garber's thesis is simple: that "Shakespeare makes modern culture and that modern culture makes Shakespeare." Writing on ten plays, she offers examples of their "uncanny" anticipation of present-day phenomena and our own appropriations of them, as in the now fashionable use of "Henry V" as a blueprint for success in business. (She quotes one manual that calls Bardolph's hanging the "*ultimate* pink slip.") Garber's approach is eclectic, spanning Freud and evolutionary biology; occasionally, she gets caught up in secondary concerns, but she is an inspiring reader. In the essay on "Richard III" and the current obsession with truth and falsehood in literature, she writes, "When public discourse is 'the fiend that lies like truth,' fiction is the ground on which we seek for (allegorical) fact. This is the power of Shakespeare."



The Vertigo Years, *by Philipp Blom (Basic Books, $29.95).* Blom's engrossing history begins with an invitation: "Imagine yourself looking at the years 1900 to 1914 without the long shadows of the future darkening their historical present." His imaginative re-creation of this period argues that speed—both literal and figurative—came to typify and, ultimately, define modern life. This was the age that gave rise not only to Futurism and Vorticism but also to car racing and the electric chair. Precipitate change also ushered in an age of uncertainty and attraction to the seeming stability of the past. The book's strength is also its charm—a multifaceted, panoramic approach animated by vivacious narration of individual stories, such as that of Eugene Sandow, the wildly popular Prussian bodybuilder and pioneering fitness mogul who counted George V and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle among his friends.

Music Quickens Time, *by Daniel Barenboim (Verso; $24.95).* For Barenboim, the conductor and pianist, music is a school for life, and its main lesson is duality—the way that a secondary voice in a Bach fugue is no less important than its main subject, or that Mozart's music constantly balances the lighter and darker aspects of human experience. (Barenboim holds both Israeli and Palestinian citizenship.) If some of the political analogies in this collection of essays stretch the limits of hope, they yield acute insights. When he relates his experiences in forming and maintaining the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (a magnificent, if unlikely, venture that brings together young Arab and Israeli musicians), the writing brims with an optimism that is both heroic and hard-won.

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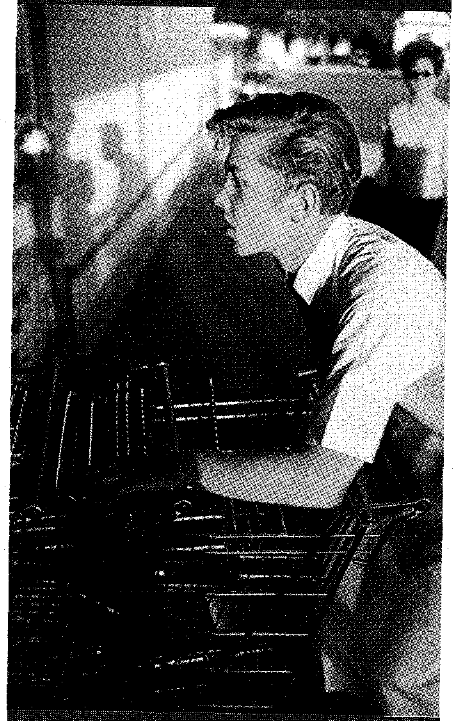

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THE THEATRE

BEWITCHED AND BOTHERED

"Pal Joey" gets a makeover.

BY JOHN LAHR

In stories published in *The New Yorker* between 1938 and 1940, John O'Hara introduced the world to the voice of the braggadocio Joey Evans, a second-rate night-club singer and first-rate cad, who, in a series of twelve apparently amiable, misspelled letters written from Chicago to his show-biz pal Ted, shows himself to be a demotic dunce with the hide of an ox and the sensitivity of an embalmer. Somewhere between the louche and the larcenous, a literary echo of both Damon Runyon and Ring Lardner, Joey inhabits the sleazy and desperate outskirts of American longing.

In early 1940, O'Hara wrote to Richard Rodgers suggesting a musical collaboration based on the character; it took Rodgers and Lorenz Hart about three weeks to create the show. O'Hara cobbled together two stories—"Bow Wow" and "A Bit of a Shock"—to form the book. And by Christmas of 1940 "Pal Joey" was on the boards, the most mature and pathfinding show of Rodgers and Hart's twenty-four-year collaboration. "Not only would the show be totally different from anything we had ever done before," Rodgers recalled in his autobiography, "Musical Stages." "It would be different from anything anyone else had ever tried." "Pal Joey," a story of sex, betrayal, contempt, and ambivalence, dared to sing about the real, not the ideal.

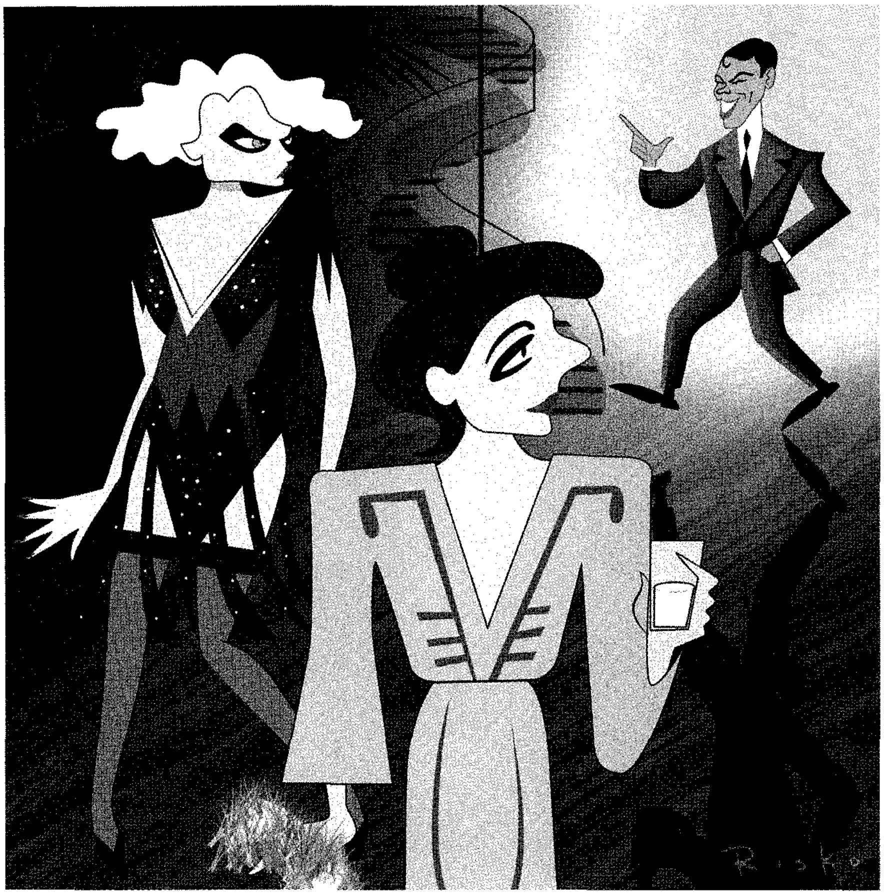
On opening night, a sozzled O'Hara, waiting for the reviews, vomited out a taxi window. After hearing the *Times'* starchy notice—"Can you draw sweet water from a foul well?" Brooks Atkinson asked—Hart sobbed and locked himself in his room. In the end, however, "Pal Joey" ran for three hundred and seventy-four performances; its 1952 revival made it to a record-breaking five hundred and forty-two. Although O'Hara, who claimed that there were "too many carpenters and nurses and other helpers" in the theatre, worked on sixteen more plays before his death, in 1970, "Pal Joey" was his only produced show. As a collaborator, he proved wayward. "SPEAK TO ME JOHN SPEAK TO ME," Rodgers wired O'Hara during rehearsals, from which he was too frequently absent. O'Hara's laissez-faire attitude is reflected in the musical's book, which is the stumbling block for any new revival: it speaks rather too much, and in the wrong way, to the contemporary ear. Anyone who tells you that Richard Greenberg's shrewd, streamlined new book for the Roundabout Theatre Company's exciting production of "Pal Joey" (well directed by Joe Mantello, at Studio 54) isn't as good as the old one hasn't read the original.

The Mantello show can't be faulted for half measures. It puts a new chassis on a classic old engine: new book, new characters, new songs borrowed without acknowledgment from other R. & H. shows, as well as—shame!—new lyrics added to Hart's comic masterpiece "Zip." In our Sondheim-dominated musical era, foul wells seem to be the *only* source of inspiration; here, before Joey has even uttered an uncouth word, he is thrown right down into one. In Graciela Daniele's new choreographed overture, gangland thugs punch Joey (Matthew Risch), amid the towering gray girders of Scott Pask's brutalist elevated train tracks, and send him sprawling, bags in hand, into the El's menacing shadows. Joey dusts himself off, knocks on doors, and walks into the club audition where the play begins: a cold heart emerging from a cold world.

The scenic and narrative gains of this production bring with them some losses, however, and the opening foreshadows them. The dance establishes the internal and external geography of the piece, but does it skew it? This leaching of charm out of the atmosphere, and, subsequently, out of the man, may be up to the minute, but it robs the character of some of his complexity. "Joey was not disreputable because he was mean, but because he had too much imagination to behave himself," Rodgers wrote. You won't find that florid imagination in Greenberg's book. Where O'Hara narrated, Greenberg demonstrates. "I know everything about you—and what I don't I can make up," Joey tells the jejune Linda (Jenny Fellner) when he picks her up at a diner. But, except for a bit of quick strategic thinking that reels in her lonely heart, we don't see any excess of imagination; we just see lies. "When I have more to tell you, maybe I'll tell you," Joey says to Mike (Robert Clohessy), the hard-bitten gay club manager, in a line taken from O'Hara's book. But Greenberg cuts the next line, which Joey spoke to himself: "And believe me, if I have nothing to tell you I'm gonna make it good." Once you strip away Joey's filigree of fancy, what's left looks merely mean.

Playing Joey in the original production made Gene Kelly a star. The revival won't work the same magic for Risch, who started out as the understudy (he took over for Christian Hoff after an injury). He is good-looking, strong-voiced, and hardworking, and he delivers the appropriate cocky brio; the performing gods have given him many talents—just not the blessing of that come-hither thing, the twinkle, that Joey must have, to explain why such a ruthless meathead is catnip to women. "Can you really have so much to learn?" the rich Mrs. Vera Simpson (Stockard Channing) says to Joey, when he woefully overplays his hand at their first meeting. Joey has no knowledge except the sure knowledge that he can pleasure women. As the song goes, "Horizontally speaking, / He's at his very best." Sexual command is at the core of both his and the show's chemistry. Risch performs that confidence, but he doesn't exude it. So, although parts of this Rodgers and Hart soufflé are delicious, it never completely rises.

If Linda sees something good in Joey, the raffish, clear-eyed Mrs. Simpson sees only sex. For the price of his company, she bankrolls Joey's dream: his own night club, Chez Joey. In her contempt for the opposite sex, Mrs. Simpson is Joey's equal. "What is a man," she asks in song, "Useless by day, / Handy by night? / Nature's mistake since the world began?" Channing makes Simpson's hauteur and her hunger sensational. She understands the loss and the ennui beneath Simpson's frivolity, and she nails them. Swift and smart, with a deep, droll voice, Channing can swagger with the best of them. The intelligence of her playing and of Greenberg's writing comes together best in a scene in which Simpson orders Joey some clothes from the haberdasher's where Linda happens to work. (This is musical comedy, after all.) "You have to really *know* a man's frame to dress him, don't you?" she says to Linda, at once sizing her up and setting her up as the competition. "And his skin—its color and texture . . . the way it feels . . . if you really want to dress a man," she says, adding, "Oh, this will look marvellous on Mr. Evans, won't it?" "I think it will," Linda says. Channing fixes her with a look. "I *know* it will," she says. Channing has the show's great song, "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered," and her ravishing interpretation makes all kinds of discoveries about love's caprice ("Lost my heart, but what of it?") and the comedy of appetite ("Vexed again, / Perplexed again, / Thank God I can be oversexed again"). Martha Plimpton, as Gladys Bumps, the Cassandra of the chorines, also has terrific innings. Plimpton has a big, surprising brassy voice and an attitude to match. Into the excellent burlesque setup to "Zip" she inserts a joke about Joey's endowment. Joey: "Sugar, you can examine my mail any day." Gladys: "If I can find it." It's a terrific Greenberg line, a psychologically revealing moment, for which the vindictive Joey will make Gladys pay.



Plimpton, Channing, and Risch put on a show in this Rodgers and Hart revival.

ROBERT RISKO

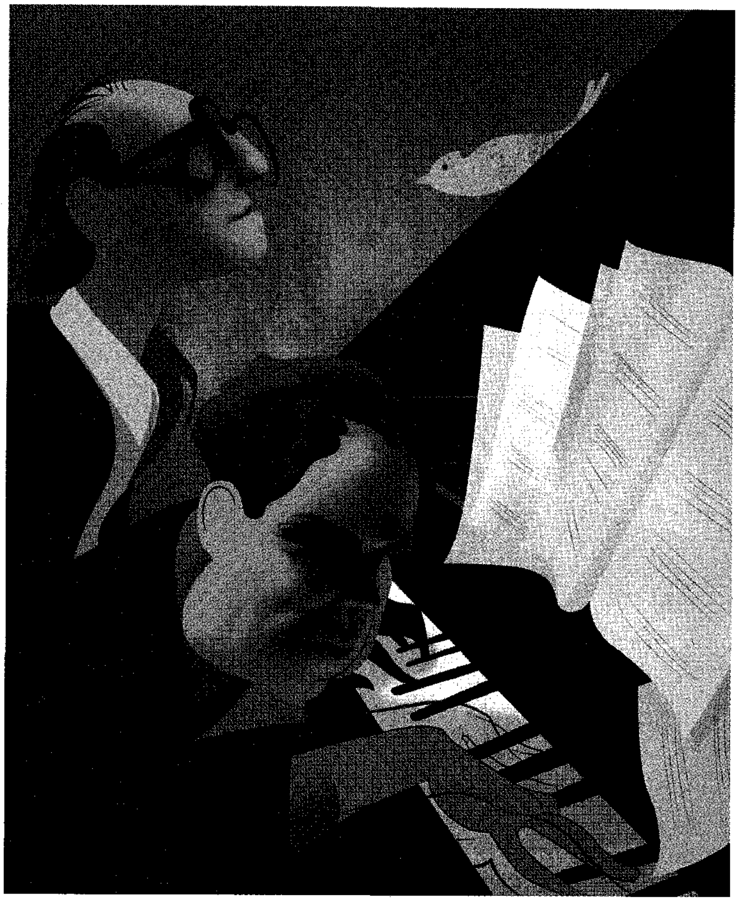
Joey's view of the world may be adolescent—he wants everything all the time—but "Pal Joey," Rodgers wrote, "forced the entire musical-comedy theatre to wear long pants for the first time." Greenberg's new book, it seems to me, superbly sets up the drama of the songs and of Joey's atrophied soul. At the finale, he is offered goodness, in the form of Linda, but he can't choose it. He rationalizes his self-destruction as self-reliance. Love doesn't find a way, but narcissism does. "What the hell am I doin'?" he asks, in the revival's final line. But he is incapable of answering his own question. For all the glory of the score and the prowess of the stagecraft on display, it is this resounding silence that announces the musical's enduring accomplishment. ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

THE CENTURY CLUB

Celebrations of Carter and Messiaen.

BY ALEX ROSS



Messiaen and Carter were born one day apart, in 1908.

ANDRÉ CARRILHO

The last emperor of China had just assumed his throne. William Howard Taft, the President-elect of the United States, was meeting with Theodore Roosevelt at the White House. A deranged veteran of the Philippine war terrorized Edgewater, New Jersey, holding up a hotel. The diva Nellie Melba disembarked from the Lusitania, resplendent in a broad-brimmed hat. Gustav Mahler was about to conduct the last of three concerts at Carnegie Hall, having unleashed his Second Symphony a few nights earlier. And Elliott Cook Carter, Jr., was born in New York City. It was December 11, 1908.

A hundred years later to the day, Mr. Carter walked onstage at Carnegie, a little hunched but moving under his own power, to receive the adulation of a capacity audience. If he had done nothing more than show up, he would have drawn a standing ovation. In fact, the composer was taking a bow for a new work: a short concerto for piano and orchestra entitled "Interventions," which Daniel Barenboim and the Boston Symphony played under the direction of James Levine. If this new piece had been merely adequate, the crowd would have been happy, but it turned out to be a lucid, vivid, potent score—one of the most immediately likable works in Carter's huge and sometimes forbidding output. This is something almost unprecedented in the history of art: an artist reaching the age of a hundred with his creativity intact.

Young composers who wonder what it takes to break into the mainstream now have the answer: live a long, long, long, long time. Carter was featured on the front page of the *Times;* visited "The Charlie Rose Show"; popped up on the local news; and appeared in Willard Scott's parade of centenarians, on NBC's "Today." In interviews, he spoke of seeing warships on the Hudson during the First World War (yes, the First); of meeting Edgard Varèse in a speakeasy during Prohibition; and of attending the concert that inspired him to become a composer—a Boston Symphony performance of "The Rite of Spring," at Carnegie, in January, 1924. "More than half the audience walked out," he recalled at a companion event at Zankel Hall, adding that the scandal made him like the piece even more: "You know how young people are!" In commemoration, Levine ended the centenary bash with the "Rite." Looking down the aisle at the back of Carter's white head, I had a moment of temporal vertigo: this man had heard the same music in the same hall almost eighty-five years earlier. Two months later, he returned to see George Gershwin play his new piece, "Rhapsody in Blue."

Once "Interventions" began, the novelty of Carter's longevity receded, and the music became the most interesting thing. Since the early nineties, Carter has backed away from the extreme density that marked his scores of previous decades. He has by no means disavowed atonality, as an Internet hoax proposed. (It had convinced composers in China, I discovered on a visit to Beijing last year.) But he has, in his own words, enjoyed "adventures in rather simpler combinations." He has also produced myriad miniatures, as if shaking off the role—which Stravinsky, among others, bestowed upon him—of being the Great Serious American Composer. There was always an impish quality behind Carter's towering dissonances and helter-skelter rhythms, but he's now something of a modernist comedian. There's also a sweetness that never quite existed before—not even when, as a young man, he wrote tonal music in the manner of Aaron Copland. He seems finally and fully himself.

"Interventions"—one of thirteen pieces that Carter has finished in the past two years—contains much familiar-sounding material. The sustained melodies for strings and solo instruments, a melancholy kind of plainsong, hark back to the Cello Sonata (1948) and the First String Quartet

(1950-51). Instruments tangle along invisible lines of scrimmage. The piano's intermittent hammering on a single note recalls the climax of the Piano Concerto, the heaviest of Carter's middle-period works. What's striking is the precision with which these skirmishes are laid out. We don't merely have an impression of multiplicity; we see, as if under a moving spotlight, each face in the throng. The score could be given to any composition class as a lesson in making one's ideas clear. At the same time, it's rich in emotion. The orchestra and the piano come from different worlds—from beginning to end, they disagree on whether to emphasize the note A or the note B-flat—but they find ways to get along, with the mediation of two bustling instrumental trios. A peanut gallery of percussion (bongo drums, maracas, slapstick, and so on) provides rude commentary. Several times, I wanted to laugh, especially when the piano part and the orchestral accompaniment seemed to mimic the personalities of the star performers for which they were written: the one brusque, animated, and prone to soliloquizing; the other expansive, effusive, and occasionally a bit Wagnerian.

At subsequent concerts, two brief Carter pieces had their world premières: "Poems of Louis Zukofsky," for soprano and clarinet, and "Duettino," for violin and cello. They had the same transparency that distinguished "Interventions" and other recent productions such as "Mosaic" and "Sound Fields" (which has a surprise B-flat-major ending). "Duettino" is dedicated to Milton Babbitt, who is ninety-two and who also remains active. I wondered if Carter might have taken inspiration from Babbitt, who has long imposed clarity and wit on his ostensibly esoteric designs. Babbitt has been moving through his nineties with little fanfare, and he deserves more attention. In the fall, I attended an all-Babbitt program by the Zukofsky Quartet, at Miller Theatre, and was particularly struck by his Fifth Quartet (1982), which echoes the brooding beauty of Berg's "Lyric Suite." Babbitt talks a mile a minute, but this music is rivetingly still, as if the raging streams of modernism had emptied into a dark, deep lake.

One day before Carter was born, Olivier Messiaen entered the world, in Avignon. He died in 1992, but he is very much with us. On the centenary day, his music rang out in churches and halls around the world, including the Southbank Centre, in London, where Pierre Boulez, Messiaen's most illustrious student, led a concert of his teacher's works; Chartres Cathedral, which resounded with the apocalyptic sonorities of "Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum"; and the Basilique Notre-Dame, in Montreal, where the entire corpus of the composer's organ music was heard. Not everyone can put up with Messiaen's Catholic ecstasies, but his canonical status seems assured, and his devotees are numerous and zealous. Paul Festa, who has made a remarkable film, "Apparition of the Eternal Church," about the experience of listening to Messiaen, suggests that the composer has become the focus of a new kind of nondenominational religious feeling, distinct from Catholicism. Messiaen might have been horrified by the notion, but his binding together of sensual and spiritual impulses is a force that acts upon diverse audiences with unpredictable intensity.

In New York, there were only three major concerts during anniversary week, but they managed to convey the different sides of Messiaen's opulently varied personality. A Voices of Ascension concert at Ascension Church concentrated on the mystical Messiaen; the "Quartet for the End of Time" again cast its spell, and the veteran Messiaenist Jon Gillock chose offbeat excerpts from the organ music. Three nights later, at Miller Theatre, the AXIOM Ensemble, a Juilliard group under the direction of Jeffrey Milarsky, presented Messiaen the modernist, sharply illuminating the complexities of "Seven Haiku," "Colors of the Celestial City," and "Et Exspecto." Finally, at Carnegie, Reinbert de Leeuw led the Yale Philharmonia in the stupendous and stupefying "Turangalîla Symphony," which reveals Messiaen as the eternal showman. Whether it's the jazzy climax of "Turangalîla," the monumental descending bass line at the end of "La Nativité du Seigneur," or the awesome shimmering of woodwind, brass, gongs, and cowbells that closes "Et Exspecto," the music has the happy effect of flattening its listeners against the wall. In either sacred or secular tones, we say, "Oh, my God." ♦

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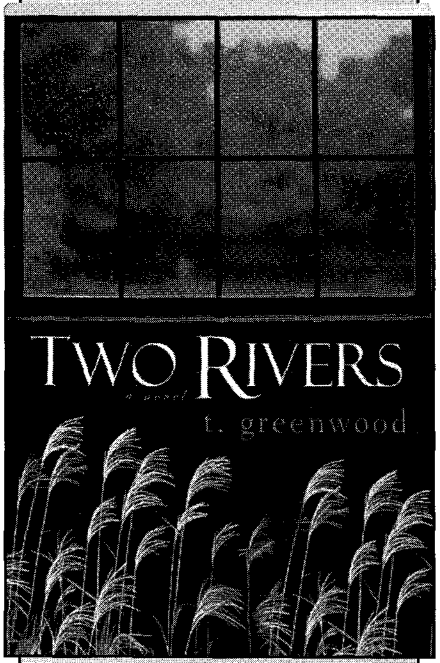
Alex Ross lists his favorite music of 2008.

"A dark and lovely elegy... I felt so moved by this luminous novel."
—Luanne Rice
New York Times bestselling author



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New York Times bestselling author of *Belong to Me*

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—Michelle Richmond
New York Times bestselling author of *The Year of Fog*

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

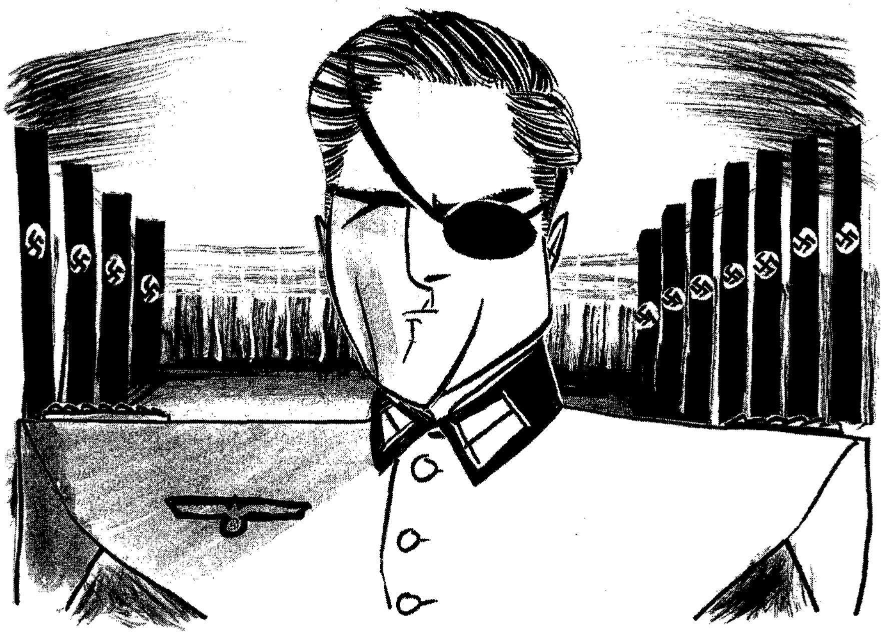
PRIVATE WARS

"Valkyrie" and "Waltz with Bashir."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Of the many historical questions raised by "Valkyrie," the most pressing is this: if General Erich Fellgiebel, the head of the German Army Signal Corps, really had looked and behaved like Eddie Izzard, just how grave a threat would the Nazis have presented to world peace? In Bryan Singer's new film, Izzard, clearly enjoying every stride in his polished, knee-high boots, does indeed play the officer in question, who oversaw communications going into and out of the *Wolfsschanze*, or Wolf's Lair, the Führer's woodland redoubt.

It was in his Lair that the Wolf came closest to being savaged by his own pack. There had been schemes against Adolf Hitler before, but it was not until the Stauffenberg plot that the motive, the means, and the opportunity cohered. The only thing missing was luck. Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, by then the chief of staff of the Reserve Army, was good-looking, high-born, much decorated, and bereft of one hand and one eye, lost in action in North Africa. In short, he was a warring Teuton straight out of central casting, complete with piratical eye patch, and that is why central casting was right to go directly to Tom Cruise. He carries the movie, although, once you dig beneath the uniform, there isn't much for him to get a handle on; the fascination with Stauffenberg resides in what he did, not in who he was.



Tom Cruise as Claus von Stauffenberg, a colonel who tried to assassinate Hitler.

TOM BACHTELL

Singer and his screenwriter, Christopher McQuarrie, last worked together on "The Usual Suspects," and there are passages here that recall the suavity of the earlier film (which remains Singer's best). The plan is for Stauffenberg to carry a briefcase bomb into the fortified bunker where he will be meeting Hitler, and then to sidle out before it blows. At the last minute, the heat of the day—July 20, 1944—causes a move to a flimsier hut, and, in one brilliant travelling shot, we see Cruise's eyes flick sideways to the hut's open windows, which can only weaken the blast. Then, in a cloakroom, as he struggles to plug the fuses into the explosive, his single hand betrays him and the briefcase threatens to slide from his grasp: the intimate, semi-comic desperation of this is exquisitely painful to watch, and, were it allied to a larger sense of the labyrinthine, as it was in "The Usual Suspects," the whole movie would coil neatly into a ball of suspense. Instead of which, it unravels.

The problem is not that we know the outcome. (The bomb went off, but the Führer's injuries were light.) We know that de Gaulle, likewise, never fell to an assassin, but that didn't stop "The Day of the Jackal" from getting under your skin. The problem is the buildup. Valkyrie was the name of a plan, which Hitler himself approved, to mobilize the military reserve in the event of a coup. The plotters tried to use this to their advantage, spreading rumors of an S.S. coup immediately after the bombing, and thus duping the Army into supporting their cause; how they expected to reveal the bluff and still enjoy the Army's support is anyone's guess. (That's what you get when aristocrats with a conscience run the show. Valkyrie didn't lack courage or commitment. It lacked N.C.O.s.) Singer does his best to unpick this tangle, but it remains highly confusing, and he is not helped by his decision to recruit an entire battalion of veteran British performers.

Character acting is, of course, one of the four things that the British still do supremely well, the others being soldiering, tailoring, and getting drunk in public, but you can have too much of a good thing, and there were points in "Valkyrie" when I felt that I was watching a slightly outré installment of the Harry Potter series. General Friedrich Olbricht was one of the prime movers in the conspiracy, but Bill Nighy, playing him in clear-rimmed spectacles, is his usual self—funny, quivering, and borderline fey. I found it hard to picture him receiving the Iron Cross. And how about Terence Stamp as General Beck? Or the ever-perplexed Tom Wilkinson as General Friedrich Fromm, a human hog? These men are meant to be battle-toughened Nazi officers, but what we get is an array of discreetly amusing studies in mild neurosis. No wonder Eddie Izzard feels at home. The one exception is David Bamber, who assumes the role of the Führer and delivers not a rant but a low-toned portrait of a paranoiac, his gaze pre-shadowed with suspicion; it's as though he were waiting for the bomb, already priming himself for revenge. When it came, it was vicious: some two hundred people were executed. Stauffenberg set the noblest of moral examples, but what makes "Valkyrie" more depressing than exciting is that it forces you to ask, against your judgment, what, exactly, he achieved.

Nobody watching the start of "Waltz with Bashir," a new animated film from Israel, could foresee the subtlety to come. The opening scene snaps the audience awake, but it doesn't go easy on the symbolism. A pack of dogs—twenty-six in all—with jaws and eyeballs of a murderous gold, pound along a city street. Which particular aggressor, we wonder, do they stand for? Here's the first twist: they don't. They come from a nightmare, suffered by a man named Boaz, who in 1982 was serving in the Israeli Army. One night, his unit approached a village that was harboring Palestinian militants; the local hounds acted as an early-warning system, so it was Boaz's job to shoot them with a silenced rifle. Guess how many he killed.

We know this because Boaz—a real guy, not a fictional character—tells the story. He tells it to Ari Folman, the director of "Waltz with Bashir," who has made a movie so unusual that it overflows any box in which you try to contain it. Call it an adult psychodocumentary combat cartoon and you're halfway there. Folman himself appears throughout the story, lightly stylized for the sake of graphic simplicity. He listens, over a drink, to Boaz's recollections, but regrets that he can't help. "I'm just a filmmaker," he says. "Films can be therapeutic," Boaz replies. What I liked about "Waltz with Bashir" is that it confronts so much and, whatever Boaz says, resolves so little. You come out feeling more troubled in mind than when you went in, and with considerable scarring to your mind's eye.

As a nineteen-year-old, Folman himself was part of the Israeli Defense Forces that went into Lebanon. He is triggered by Boaz's memories into realizing, to his consternation, that he has none of his own. He was present, he knows, at the notorious occasion, in September, 1982, on which Christian Phalangists entered the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, in West Beirut (whose entry points were controlled by the I.D.F.), and carried out a massacre of the civilians inside, but nothing of that time has, until now, stayed in his head. This makes sense: the worse the trauma and the guilt, the deeper it lurks under the volcano, and only when Ari meets up with Boaz does the lava begin to flow. He is soon visited by his own dream—an ominous vision of himself and his comrades, rising naked from the sea off the coast of Beirut. This is one of many fluid images that stream through the film, ranging from spits of rain on a car window to a giant woman who backstrokes in the ocean, cradling another friend of Ari's on her bosom. These harrowed men seem to believe that they were born out of amniotic peace into a new horror, where the dominant liquid was blood.

You could argue that the film has no business forging such beauty out of savage facts. What comfort is it to the relatives of the Sabra and Shatila victims, you might ask, that a few conscripts who stood by and did nothing are now free to articulate, and even to lyricize, their internal pain? My suspicion is that Folman is all too aware of that charge. That is why, whatever the rapture that laps at his work, its basic rhythm is hard and halting. (Much of the dialogue is pure questioning: "Shooting? At who?" "How do I know?") Ari goes from one old colleague to the next, probing them for what actually occurred on those September nights. We learn of the single foe with a grenade launcher who took on Israelis in an orchard, and turned out to be a kid; of the soldier who doused himself in patchouli, so that his fellows could trace him in the dark; and of another, Ori, who kept the worst violence at bay by telling himself that he was simply watching a movie.

At the end of "Waltz with Bashir," we suddenly switch to normal film: genuine news footage from the refugee camps. The screen is filled with the dead, including a child. I know what Folman wants to do here, but it strikes me as a mistake. He has already admitted, via Ori's tale, that a camera can both present us with suffering and shield us from it (that is the paradox of TV), and, what is more, we have spent the past ninety minutes coming to terms with the style and the conviction of his filmmaking. His chosen idiom, with its jagged lines and its unforgettable coloring—sick yellows and bruised browns, like a black eye—has proved more than adequate to the summoning of things that he, like some of his countrymen, had fought to forget. Why scorn it now? When reality bites, is that the time for the artist to lay down his brush? ♦

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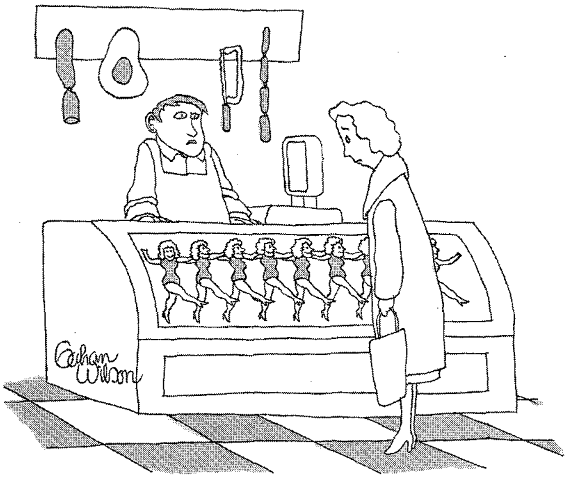
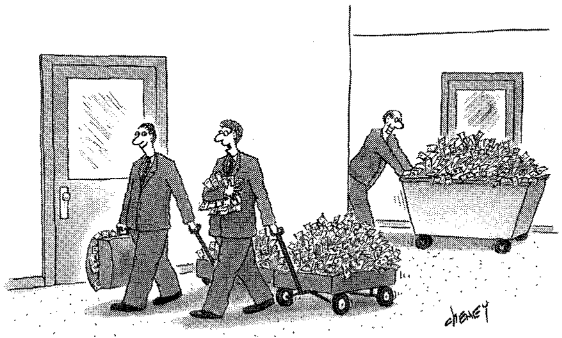
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Drew Dernavich, must be received by Sunday, January 4th. Finalists in the December 15th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 19th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"I'd suggest you keep them away from the gingerbread men."
Vincent Coca, Staten Island, N.Y.



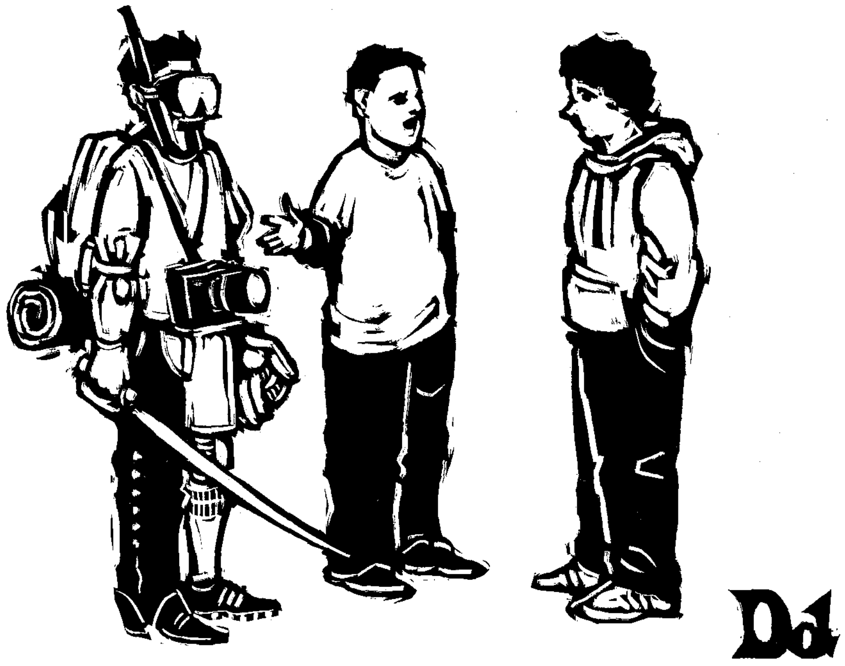
THE FINALISTS

"Who would have thought they'd actually give money to a ***bank****!"*
Michael Jensen, New Rochelle, N.Y.

"At the next bailout, let's also ask for a pony."
Lynn Tudor, New York City

"Did you send your thank-you card to Congress?"
Harvey Kaslow, Pasadena, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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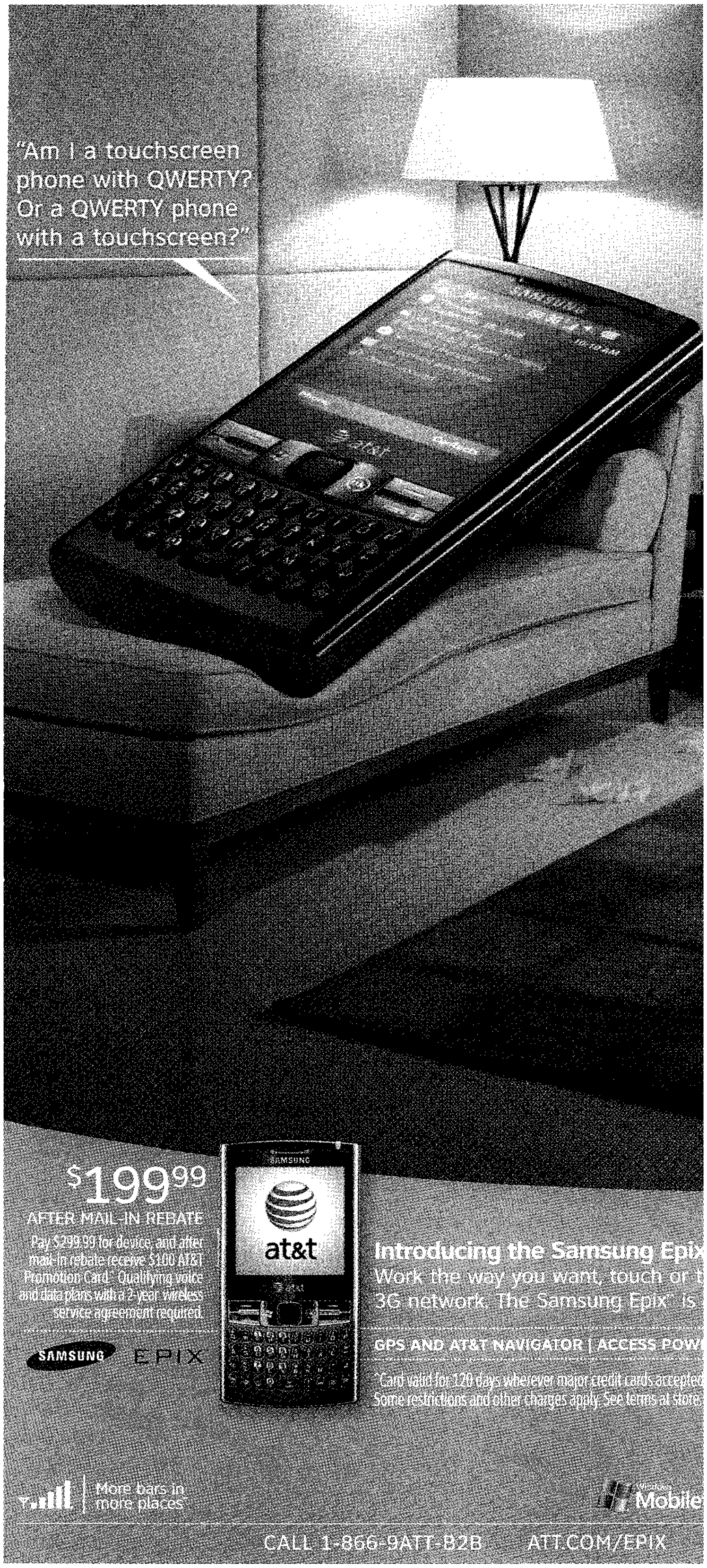
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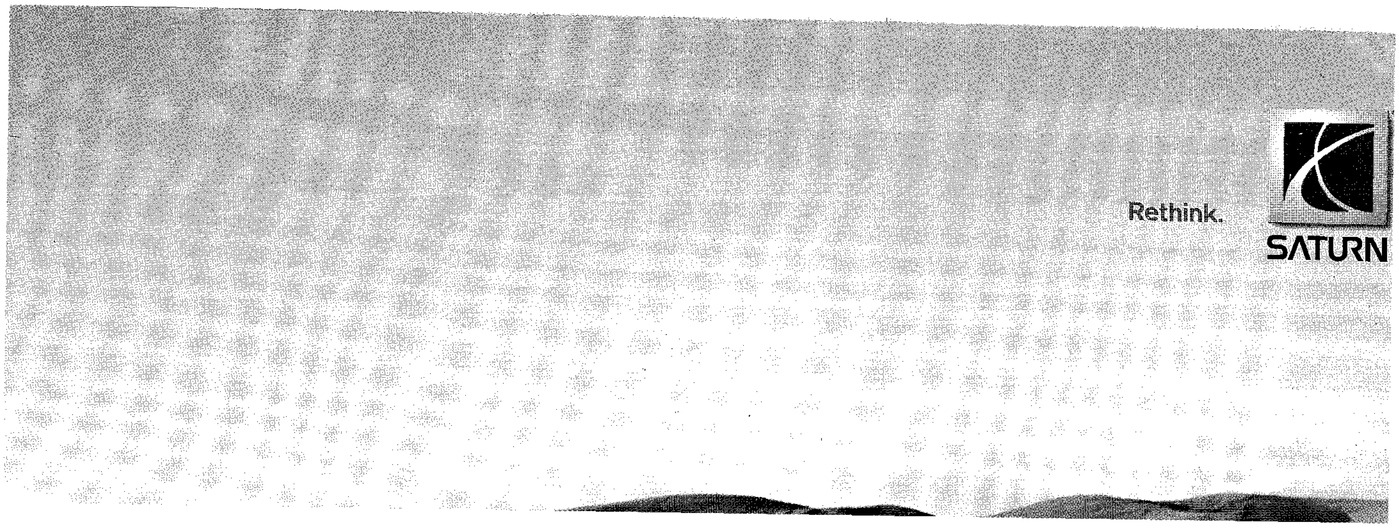
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